STARS OF THE WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

World Soccer®

GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

May 2017

COACH PROFILE

CONTE

How the Italian master conquered English football

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Dries Mertens

Small man, big impact

TALENT SCOUT

CLASS OF '97

The youngsters setting Europe alight

FACE TO FACE

GIGI BECALI

Face to face with the world's craziest club owner

PLUS

HOLLAND · BRIAN GLANVILLE · GEORGIA

“Art of Football bring out
the beauty in the game's most
memorable moments” Copa90

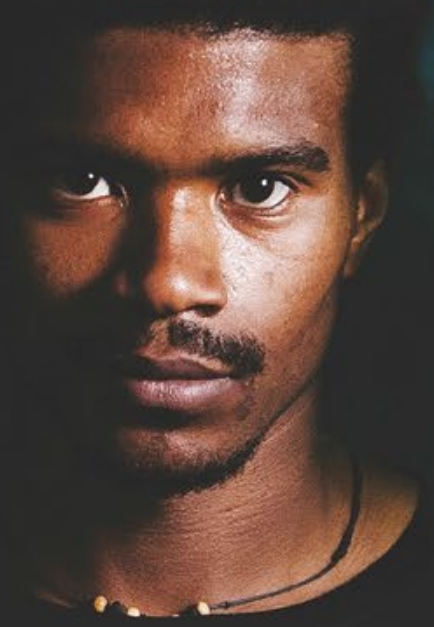
“Art of Football capture classic
moments in a vibrant,
contemporary style” The Guardian

“Art of Football get it.
those split-second moments
are treasured memories and their
artwork captures them in a
classy and stylish way" Ball Street

“Art of Football's shirts capture
the vibrancy of the game
like no other” Dirty Tackle

“Art of Football - where the
beautiful game comes to life”
Hitesh Ratna, Editor, FourFourTwo

“The Art of Football team create
truly unique and authentic content
that is designed to emotionally connect
real fans to the biggest moments
in the game” Adidas Uk



Art-of-football.com

WorldSoccer
Global football intelligence since 1960

Contents

May 2017

FEATURES

40 **Player biography**
Dries Mertens

48 **Coach profile**
Antonio Conte

70 **World Cup**
Qualifying review

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 **In pictures**
10 **From the Editor**
14 **Keir Radnedge** FIFA report doomed to fail
18 **On the radar** Gian Piero Gasperini
20 **Paul Gardner** aggressive keepers
25 **ESM XI**
27 **Ins & outs** people on the move
28 **Brian Glanville** head injuries a concern

EYEWITNESS

32 **Georgia**
36 **Crimea**

6 OF THE BEST

46 **Summer free transfers**

TALENT SCOUT

54 **Class of '97**

FACE TO FACE

56 **Gigi Becali**

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

60 **Big names for Spring Series**

PICTURE ESSAY

62 **China entertain South Korea**

ARCHIVES

66 **May 1997**

THE GREAT MATCHES

90 **Brazil v England, 1970**

27

46

54

90

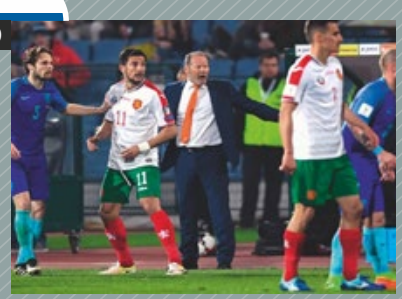
Follow World Soccer online
FOOTBALL 24-7

Follow @worldsoccermag Like World Soccer Magazine

SAVE MONEY ON WorldSoccer
Exclusive subscription offer.
See page 8

World Service

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents



80

75 **Mexico** referees' strike action avoided
76 **Ukraine** Shakhtar thrive despite problems
78 **Germany** striking talent thin on the ground
80 **Holland** poor results cost Blind his job
82 **Hungary** Magyars are on the up

PLUS 74 Global diary 84 Results, tables, fixtures

In Pictures

The global game caught on camera

AUSTRALIA...a Melbourne City fan juggles a ball before an A-League game against Newcastle Jets

SPAIN...shadows are cast as Real Madrid's Isco challenges Edgar Mendez of Alaves

GERMANY...Bayern Munich (in red) and Borussia Dortmund clash at the former's Allianz Arena

SWEDEN...a Malmo fan lights a flare during the Allsvenskan game against IFK

DENMARK...Brondby players celebrate after an away game at Lyngby

LUXEMBOURG...Djibril Sidibe of France is taken away on a stretcher during a World Cup qualifier

HOLLAND...Ajax's Justin Kluivert is tackled by Bart Nieuwkoop of Feyenoord

Subscribe today and

SAVE UP TO 31%

Subscribe online at
worldsoccersubs.com/11ZK

Complete the coupon opposite

THE DIRECT DEBIT GUARANTEE: This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits · If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit Time Inc. (UK) Ltd will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request Time Inc. (UK) Ltd to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request. · If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd or your bank or building society you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society – If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when Time Inc. (UK) Ltd asks you to · You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.

WORLD SOCCER SUBSCRIPTION OFFER

HERE'S THE DEAL:

- Pay less than at the newsagent
- 13 issues a year delivered direct to your door
- Enjoy exclusive offers with Rewards. Visit worldsoccer.com/rewards

0330 333 1113

Quote code: 11ZK

Monday to Saturday from 8am to 6pm (UK time)

The Rewards scheme is available for all active print subscribers of magazines published by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, free of charge. Digital subscribers also get access as long as the subscription has been purchased directly through the publishers at magazinesdirect.com. For full terms and conditions visit mymagazinerewards.co.uk.

Post the completed order form to: FREEPOST Time Inc
(No further address needed. No stamp required – for UK only)

YES! I would like to subscribe to **World Soccer**

☐ UK 6 Monthly Direct Debit: Pay only £22.99 every 6 months saving 31% (full price £33.40) **TOP OFFER**

☐ 2 years (26 issues) Cheque/Credit or Debit Card- Pay only £93.49 (full price £133.58) saving 30% across the two years

☐ 1 year (13 issues) Cheque/Credit or Debit Card- Pay only £49.49 (full price £66.79) saving 25% across the year

OVERSEAS OFFERS: SAVING UP TO 35%

+44 330 333 1113 quote code 11ZK

or visit **worldsoccersubs.com/11ZK**

US toll free number 1888 313 5528 (lines open Mon-Fri 7am-13:30pm Central Time)

YOUR DETAILS:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: Forename:

Surname:

Email:

Address:

Postcode:

Home Tel. No: (inc area code)

Mobile:

Date of Birth: D D M M Y Y Y Y

GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

Please fill out to give more than one subscription, please supply address details on a separate sheet.

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: Forename:

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

CHOOSE FROM 3 EASY WAYS TO PAY:

1. **CHEQUE**

I enclose a cheque/postal order for: £_____ made payable to Time Inc. (UK) Ltd.

2. **CREDIT/DEBIT CARD**

Please debit my: ☐ Amex ☐ Visa ☐ Visa Debit ☐ Mastercard

Card No.

Expiry Date

M M Y Y

Signature: Date:

(I am over 18)

3. **DIRECT DEBIT: To pay £22.99 every 6 months by UK Direct Debit, please complete your details below:**

PAYMENT DETAILS – DIRECT DEBIT
Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit.
For office use only: Originators Reference – 764 221

DIRECT Debit

Name of Bank:

Address of Bank:

Postcode:

Name of Account Holder:

Sort Code: Account No:

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society Please pay Time Inc. (UK) Ltd Direct Debits from the account detailed on this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Time Inc. (UK) Ltd and if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank or Building Society.

Signature: Date:

(I am over 18)

*£22.99 payable by 6 monthly Direct Debit. This price is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. **Offer closes 31st May 2017.** Offer open to new subscribers only. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 1 year (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries from the UK please call: 0330 333 4333, for overseas please call: +44 330 333 4333 (lines are open Monday- Saturday, 8am- 6pm UK Time, ex. Bank Holidays) or e-mail: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone providers call bundle. We will process your data in accordance with our Privacy Policy (www.timeincuk.com/privacy). By providing your information, you agree to be contacted by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, publisher of World Soccer and other iconic media brands, with information about our goods and services and those of our carefully selected third parties. Please tick here if you do not wish to receive these messages: ☐ by email and/or SMS ☐ by post and/or telephone ☐ about carefully selected third party goods and services.

XWS Code 11ZK

FROM THE EDITOR

We may live in rapidly changing global times, but it's reassuring that some things in football stay the same.

Brazil have become the first team to qualify for the World Cup (page 70). After hitting rock bottom in 2014 – and that 7-1 humiliation by Germany – their revival under coach Tite has been impressive.

Players who looked dead and buried, such as Thiago Silva, have been reborn and, crucially, Tite has looked beyond the big leagues of western Europe, bringing Paulinho back in from the cold.

> Football is a creature of habit and Argentina may yet recover from their poor qualifying campaign and make it to Russia

Football is a creature of habit and Argentina, despite their problems, may yet recover from their poor qualifying campaign and make it to Russia. It's worth remembering that Brazil were in a similar position in 2001, written off before the arrival of Luiz Felipe Scolari, and ended up triumphing in Yokohama barely a year later.

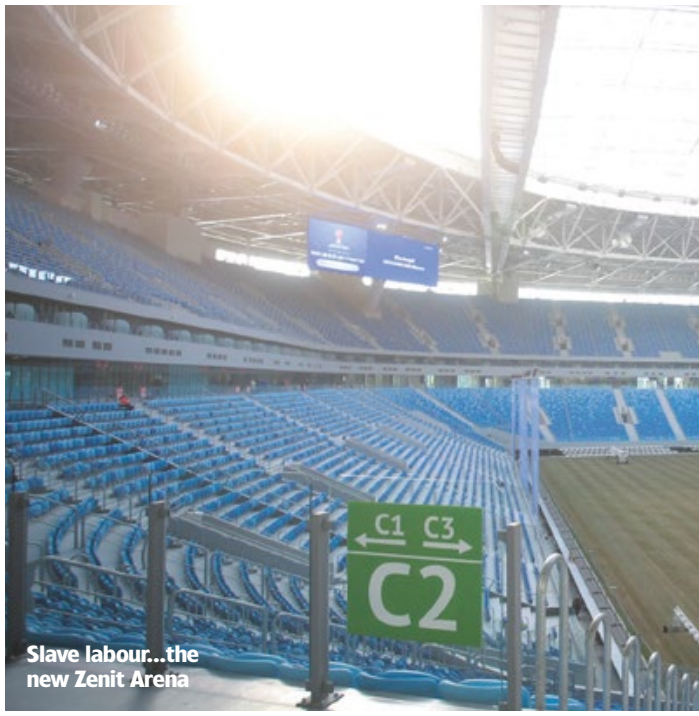
Talking of familiar themes, next month we'll publish our annual list of the world's leading 500 footballers. The focus will be on those who are starring for club and country, as well as those who will be most sought after in this summer's transfer market.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Brazil become the first team to qualify for the 2018 World Cup p70
2 Argentina's Lionel Messi banned for four matches p71
3 Argentina coach Edgardo Bauza sacked p71
4 USA, Mexico and Canada launch 2026 World Cup bid p10
5 Ivory Coast appoint Marc Wilmots p27
6 Referees' strike in Mexico p75
7 Hugo Broos stays as Cameroon coach p26
8 Dick Advocaat to retire p27
9 Russian World Cup organisers under fire p10
10 Madagascar's Ahmad confirmed as new CAF boss p22

RUSSIA



Slave labour...the new Zenit Arena

World Cup organisers under fire for North Korean "slaves"

Russian construction companies are reportedly using North Korean slave labour to build the new World Cup stadium in St Petersburg.

According to an investigation by Norwegian magazine *Josimar*, 110 North Koreans have been forced to work in "slave conditions" to build the new Zenit Arena, which is scheduled to host a semi-final of the 2018 World Cup.

The North Koreans are forced to work seven days a week, live in inhumane conditions and sleep in shipping containers. One of the workers was found dead in a shipping container not far from the construction site, according to *Josimar*.

Costs for the new stadium have rocketed from an original $220million to $1.5billion.

WORLD CUP

USA, Mexico and Canada announce joint 2026 bid

The United States, Canada and Mexico have confirmed they will make a joint bid to host the 2026 World Cup.

The proposal to host an expanded 48-team tournament would involve the USA hosting 60

"We were never asked. This gives you the feeling of impotence"

Borussia Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel complains at UEFA's rescheduling of his team's clash with Monaco 24 hours after explosions hit the team bus

matches, with 10 games each staged in Canada and Mexico.

US President Donald Trump has promised to build a border wall between the USA and Mexico but Sunil Gulati, president of the US Soccer Federation, said Trump is "supportive" of the bid and had "encouraged" it.

"The United States, Mexico and Canada have individually demonstrated their exceptional abilities to host world-class events," added Gulati.

"When our nations come together as one – as we will for 2026 – there is no question the United States, Mexico and Canada will deliver an experience that will celebrate the game and serve players, supporters and partners alike."

In a controversial move, FIFA has already awarded American TV rights to the 2026 finals to Fox and Telemundo.

Trio...(left to right) Canada's Victor Montagliani, Sunil Gulati and Decio De Maria of Mexico

HEROES & VILLAINS

DUNCAN WATMORE

Lifesaver...Watmore

The Sunderland striker saved three holidaymakers in Barbados when the fishing boat they were on was hit and broken in two by a catamaran. The 23-year-old, who was recovering from an operation following a cruciate-knee-ligament injury at the time, managed to haul three elderly passengers out of the water before the boat sank.

PAULINHO

The Brazilian became the first player in World Cup qualifying history to score a hat-trick for a visiting team in Uruguay. The midfielder's three goals came in Brazil's 4-1 win in Montevideo after they trailed to an Edinson Cavani goal. In doing so, they became the first team to come from behind and win a World Cup qualifier in Uruguay.

Veteran...Esteban Paredes

ESTEBAN PAREDES

The "Tank", as he is known, became the oldest goalscorer for Chile when, at the age of 36 years and 239 days, he scored twice in the 3-1 World Cup qualifying win against Venezuela.

ALVARO MORATA

Became the first Spanish-born Real Madrid player since Raul, in 2009, to score a hat-trick in La Liga when he netted three times in his club's 4-2 win away to Leganes.

LIVERPOOL

The Premier League club were banned from signing academy players for two years and also fined £100,000 after they were found guilty of a breach of regulations when they attempted to sign a youngster from Stoke City.

Youth...Liverpool's youngsters (in red) take on Stoke

FILIPPO DI PIERRO

The Italian coach of Spanish third-division side Eldense was arrested after a 12-0 defeat by Barcelona's B team, following accusations that he had agreed to fix the game. He was hired in January by an unnamed investment group that has since severed ties with the club.

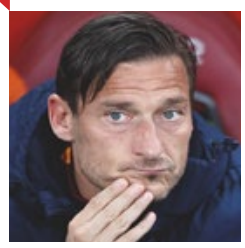
ESTEGHLAL FANS

The Iranian club's supporters flashed laser beams at the ref and players of Al Sadd of Qatar, and previously Lokomotiv of Uzbekistan, during two Asian Champions League matches. The club were fined $51,000 for the incidents.

FABIO COENTRAO

Real Madrid's Portuguese full-back paid an accomplice to help him cheat in his driving-theory test before his move to Spain in 2011. He confessed to having someone point to the right answers during a video exam. After being found guilty, a court ordered him to pay €3,000 to a charity food bank in Braga.

Cheat... Coentrao



"I've almost made my decision, but I'll wait for May or June. I will never become a coach, I don't like to be one against 30, players are so sly"

Roma's 40-year-old Francesco Totti considers his future

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 LUKAS PODOLSKI
Germany v England
On his last-ever international appearance for Germany, he produces a fine left-foot shot from outside the penalty area that curls away from Joe Hart and into the top corner.

2 JOHAN ARANGO
Santa Fe v Millonarios
Connects with a flick by Denis Stracqualursi and strokes the ball low into the bottom corner.

3 AVILES HURTADO
Tijuana v Atlas
Spectacular bicycle kick from the centre of the penalty area following a corner.

4 MAREK HAMSIK
Napoli v Juventus
Some patient possession football, followed by a lovely one-two with Dries Mertens and a shot into the top corner.

5 HATEM BEN ARFA
Paris Saint-Germain v Avranches
From a short free-kick wide of the penalty area, he curls a powerful left-foot shot into the far top corner.

6 EL ARABI HILLEL SOUDANI
Dinamo Zagreb v Rijeka
Controls the ball on his chest and then scores with a spectacular overhead kick into the top corner.

WINNERS

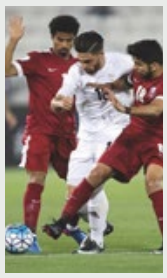
BRAZIL
The five-time world champions are the first team to have secured their qualification for next year's World Cup finals in Russia.

CELTIC
Having already won the Scottish League Cup, a 5-0 victory away to Hearts saw the Hoops claim a sixth successive Premiership title – and their 48th championship in total.

BRUCE ARENA
Won the first game in his second spell in charge of the USA as they got back on track in the World Cup qualifiers with a 6-0 victory over Honduras.

LOSERS

QATAR
The 2022 World Cup hosts were eliminated from the 2018 qualifiers and will be the only hosts never to have previously played in a World Cup.



ARGENTINA
Dropped out of the automatic qualification places for the World Cup after losing 2-0 to Bolivia.

MONACO
The French side's 14-year wait for major silverware continues after they were beaten 4-1 by Paris Saint-Germain in the League Cup Final.

WorldSoccer Rewards

MONTHLY EXTRAS, EXCLUSIVE TO SUBSCRIBERS

48 free* fragrant English lavender plants worth £31.96

Save 25% or more on Sandown Park, Kempton Park and Epsom Downs race tickets

Win a cookery class and goody bag for yourself and a friend

Save 10% on your road and mountain bike events this season

Join Rewards today and get even more from your magazine subscription at no extra cost. Enjoy exclusive handpicked offers and unique giveaways every month.

Redeem your rewards today at

worldsoccer.com/rewards

*Just pay £5.65 postage • The Rewards scheme is available for all active print subscribers of magazines published by Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, free of charge. Digital subscribers also get access, as long as the subscription has been purchased directly through the publishers at magazinesdirect.com • Full terms and conditions are available at mymagazinerewards.co.uk • For enquiries, contact help@magazinesdirect.com or call 0330 333 4333 (Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8:30am-5:30pm UK time, excluding Bank Holidays)

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

FIFA corruption report is doomed to fail

There was no cause for rejoicing when FIFA promised there was to be a summarising post-mortem on the 22-month, 10-million document, internal investigation into corruption at its heart and head.

Lawyers Quinn Emanuel had set off on their extensive – not to mention highly lucrative – search in the wake of the drama of May 2015, when seven of world football's high-flyers were yanked from their five-star beds at the Baur au Lac Hotel in Zurich and extradited to the United States.

Only one of the seven was bound for an alternative route, with the then-CONMEBOL president Eugenio Figueredo, who was already wanted in his homeland of Uruguay. Interestingly, although Figueredo is currently supposed to be under house arrest, several of his neighbours have reported how this apparently seems to include a clause that allows him out to walk his dog...

As for world football's governing body, the detentions were followed later in the day by the unveiling of full and frank details of the US Justice Department's FIFAGate investigation into what is estimated – very conservatively – to have entailed a $200million rip-off of sponsor and TV rights in the Americas.

Sentencing for the plea-bargain majority of the 40 arrested is scheduled to start at the end of April, with trials for a dwindling number of those defiantly pleading innocence set for November.

Just about all have been banished from the game by the FIFA ethics chamber in the meantime, so to that extent the internal investigation has been a safety-first, belt-and-braces exercise, put in place as sort of "just in case" scenario.

To a large extent the policing work has been done by the Americans, all starting with the clues provided by Chuck Blazer's silly initial omission of failing to file a tax return.

Frustrated investigation... Michael Garcia

All sports bodies are restricted in enacting checks and balances by the lack of policing powers such as house searches and bank statements access. But Sepp Blatter had evidence in his hands, literally, that money was amiss right back to that fateful day in the mid-1990s when a commission cheque from marketing partner ISL for then-president Joao Havelange landed on his own desk.

In those days Havelange – and his son-in-law, Ricardo Teixeira – was not in breach of Swiss law in accepting cash to influence TV and sponsor awards. Sums of up to an eventual total of $20m – a conservative estimate again – were considered as commissions and not as bribes.

However, the pair were constrained eventually to pay back some of their smoothly-gotten gains because ISL's collapse was deemed to have been a result of criminal commercial negligence. Hence they had profited from criminally tainted gains. It cost Havelange the honorary presidency of FIFA and his status as a member of the International Olympic Committee – although he resigned both titles before suffering the indignity of being forcibly stripped of both.

Ultimately, in a disgrace of a deal, secrecy of the ISL settlement was negotiated by FIFA in sorting the pay-off. Not until a decade later was FIFA finally shamed into releasing its version of the judgment. Even then,

House arrest... Eugenio Figueredo (second left) arrives at court

only a handful of old crooks could be identified through the codes.

So, did FIFA learn anything from the ISL scandal? Of course not.

FIFA was shamed once again by the media into grumpy, reluctant analytical action by the scandal-riven 2018-2022 World Cup hosting awards. American attorney Michael Garcia was appointed first investigating prosecutor of an upgraded ethics chamber and set about interviewing all and sundry. Where he could not go – his own United States and Russia, where he was persona non grata from his previous corruption-busting days in New York – he sent Swiss assistant Cornel Borbely.

Garcia started work in 2012 and, after 18 months, despatched a report to ethics chairman Hans-Joachim Eckert. The latter's muddled summary managed only to upset everyone, including Garcia who subsequently quit in protest.

Scandal...Sepp Blatter (left) with his predecessor Joao Havelange

The unexpurgated report is apparently still sitting in a safe in the office of Marco Villiger, FIFA's legal director under Blatter and, intriguingly, the one and only survivor of the purge undertaken since Gianni Infantino's accession to the presidency in February last year.

Even now, there is as yet no sign that even a redacted version of the Garcia report will ever see the light of day.

FIFA has a corporate talent for commissioning reports and then locking them out of sight in the hope they will be forgotten, with every further report a reminder that something nasty is lurking in the murky depths of the home of FIFA, as if guarded by some footballing equivalent of the Phantom of the Opera.

Hence the Quinn Emanuel reports (there may be three of them) have been passed on to the Office of the Attorney-General in Switzerland, a country which does not have the best record – or, indeed, any record – of willingness to shed light on wrongdoing in its midst.

No surprise, then, that every international sports federation worth the name has set up its formal headquarters in Switzerland, even when the real work is undertaken in London or Paris or New York.

The Swiss authorities reacted spikily when the German federation published a report from its own lawyers into the mucky state of play over the infamous loan from Robert Louis-Dreyfus back in 2002. Apparently the Swiss considered this might compromise their own investigation.

The Swiss could have been digging into FIFA years before the US DoJ shamed them into jumping into serious action. Now, some 20 months since Blatter and Michel Platini were hauled from an ExCo meeting and quizzed about the notorious "disloyal payment", little progress appears to have been achieved behind the smokescreen of confidentiality.

> FIFA has a corporate talent for commissioning reports and then locking them out of sight in the hope they will be forgotten

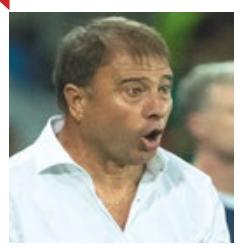
Blatter and sacked secretary-general Jerome Valcke were placed long ago under criminal investigation. However, they were the only ones – and no one has been charged with any offence.

In any case, since most of the mischief was being committed by foreigners now steering well clear of Switzerland, the prospect of anyone actually being charged with anything, let alone brought to trial, appears not even negligible.

A fine line exists between secrecy and confidentiality.

FIFA's report summarising the internal investigation will doubtless focus on reforms, looking forward rather than back.

But how can the value of the reforms be judged when the details of the provocations remain secret? WS



"Players who don't dare voice the slightest criticism at their clubs should be doubly careful of doing so with the national team"

Israel coach Elisha Levy suspends two of his squad, Tomer Hemed and Ariel Harush, for publicly attacking his choices

Reports we couldn't make up

1 SEQUINS AND SPRAY TANS

Two rivals from the 1982 World Cup were in competition again when the latest series of Italy's version of *Strictly Come Dancing* began.

Claudio Gentile of Italy and Brazil's Zico were opponents in the classic match at the Sarria Stadium in Barcelona in 1982 – which Italy won 3-2 with a Paolo Rossi hat-trick – and were competing against each other again as a one-off guest appearance on the new series of *Dancing with the Stars*.

Gentile teamed up with professional dancer Roberta Beccarini while Zico partnered Ornella Boccafoschi.

Roberto Mancini also featured in the same guest slot a couple of weeks earlier.

Partners...Claudio Gentile with Roberta Beccarini

Photo: Antonelli/AGF/REX/Shutterstock

Team work...Zico

2 MILANO MARATHON

Four former players from Internazionale and Milan took place in the recent Milano Marathon.

Cristian Chivu and Ivan Cordoba, who both played for Inter, lined up alongside Milan stalwart Franco Baresi and former goalkeeper Francesco Toldo, who began his career with Milan without playing, before finishing his career at Inter.

All donned the blue and black stripes of Inter and crossed the finish line together.

3 COACH STAGES SEVEN-WEEK SIT-IN

Gerard Nus, who was a member of Avram Grant's backroom staff when he was Ghana coach, staged a seven-week sit-in at a hotel in Accra over the non-payment of his salary.

The 32-year-old Spaniard had been refusing to leave the hotel since the end of the Africa Nations Cup in February.

The matter was finally resolved when the Ghana Football Association handed over all his outstanding wages, prompting Nus to post on Twitter: "Thanks to all people of Ghana. Great memories always from this passionate football country."

Caught out...Jiang Zhipeng

Finish...(left to right) Chivu, Baresi, Toldo and Cordoba

4 LOSS DUE TO PLAYING AWAY

The wife of China international Jiang Zhipeng blamed his extra-marital affairs for his mistake that led to a World Cup qualifying defeat against Iran. His mis-placed header presented the home side with the game's only goal.

"For three-and-a-half years out of our four-year marriage, he was sleeping with other women," said Zhang Zhiyue, who also revealed on social media that he had filed for divorce.

"Now he is trying to drive me to an early grave."

She has called for the Chinese FA to "expel" the 28-year-old Guangzhou R&F defender from professional football.

5 ICELAND BABY BOOM

Iceland's humiliation of England at Euro 2016 has had a long-lasting effect on the Icelandic nation.

Nine months on from the stunning victory over England that sent Iceland into the quarter-finals, a doctor at an

Cheat...Diego Maradona

Child's play...Iceland

Icelandic hospital has reported giving a record number of epidurals to women giving birth.

Asgeir Petur Thorvaldsson, a doctor in the anesthesiology department at Landspitali University Hospital in the Icelandic capital Reykjavik, tweeted: "[We] set a record for the number of epidurals in the maternity duty this weekend – nine months after the 2-1 win over England."

6 MESSI COKE BUST

Peruvian police seized 1,417 kilos of cocaine – all packaged with images of Lionel Messi.

The drugs, worth a reported $85m, were found in a shipping container destined for Belgium. The Barcelona and Argentina star's face was plastered all over the packaging, with his name, the Barca logo and the seal of the King of Spain also depicted.

7 MARADONA UP TO OLD TRICKS

Diego Maradona was up to his old tricks prior to the Under-20 World Cup draw in South Korea.

Argentina's World Cup winner re-enacted his famous "Hand of God" goal against England in 1986 in a five-a-side exhibition game at Hwaseong Haenggung Square in Suwon.

8 MACHINE BACK IN ACTION

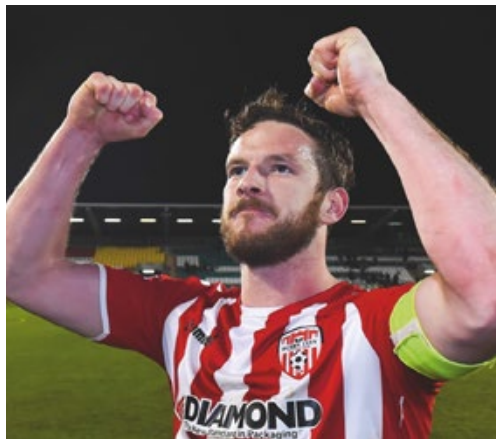
Ex-Germany keeper Tim Wiese, who retired in 2014 and launched a career in pro wrestling, recently made a cameo appearance in the German eighth division. More than four years after his last Bundesliga game, he turned out for SSV Dillingen in a 2-1 loss to Haunsheim in a regional league derby game.

Since retiring from football, the 35-year-old has appeared at WWE events under the nickname "The Machine".

However, his return to football is likely to be a one-off as it was just a favour for his friend Christoph Nowak, who is Dillingen's chairman.

Multi-talented... professional goalkeeper turned wrestler Tim Wiese

OBITUARIES



Ryan McBRIDE (1989-2017)
The captain of League of Ireland side Derry City died suddenly at the age of 27. He was found dead at his home in Derry, 24 hours after captaining his local side to victory over Drogheda United, the club's fourth straight league win. The previous week McBride scored the winner against Shamrock Rovers.

Herbert ADDO (1951-2017)
A former coach of Ghana's national side, he made history in 2010 by winning the Ghana Premier League with promoted Aduana Stars in their first season in the top flight. He also won two league titles with Ghanaian side Obuasi Goldfields and led them to the 1997 CAF Champions League Final, where they lost on penalties to Raja Athletic Club of Morocco.

Ronnie MORAN (1934-2017)

Former captain who played 379 games for Liverpool between 1952 and 1966, before joining the club's back-room staff and twice filling in as caretaker manager – following Kenny Dalglish's resignation in 1991 and after Graeme Souness' heart surgery in 1992.

Anibal RUIZ (1942-2017)
Known as "*El Mano*" (the hand), he suffered a heart attack on the pitch prior to a Mexican league game between Puebla, where he was assistant coach, and Veracruz. He worked with club sides across South and central America, and took charge of the national sides of El Salvador and Paraguay.

"Messi is paying for the fact that FIFA don't like Tapia, Angelici and the execs at the AFA"

Former Paraguay goalkeeper Jose Luis Chilavert blames the four-match ban for Argentina's captain on football politics

Gian Piero GASPERINI (Atalanta)

One of the stories of the Serie A season has been the rise of Atalanta under Gasperini. A 5–0 win against Genoa in April put them fifth and in contention for a Europa League place next season.

The club has always been a terrific breeding ground for young players, and this current crop are no exception.

Andrea Petagna and Leonardo Spinazzola both made their Italy debuts this winter, while under-21 regulars Andrea Conti and Mattia Caldara have also been called into the senior squad.

Gasperini, however, would probably be the first to admit that the jewel in the crown is Argentinian schemer Alejandro "Papu" Gomez, whose hat-trick in Genoa took his seasonal tally to 14. If and when the former San Lorenzo and Catania man moves on, he will be badly missed.

Europe beckons... Gian Piero Gasperini

SPAS DELEV (Bulgaria)
The scorer of both of his country's goals in a 2–0 World Cup qualifying win over Holland that sealed the fate of the visitors' coach, Danny Blind.

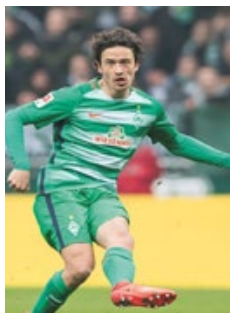
Double...Spas Delev

"Quality and talent don't have an age"

France coach Didier Deschamps gives a first cap to 18-year-old Monaco sensation Kylian Mbappe

HAN Kwang-song (Cagliari)
The teenager became the first North Korean to play in Serie A when he made his debut for Cagliari and scored his first goal a week later.

Matthijs DE LIGT (Ajax)
At 17 years and 225 days, the defender became Holland's youngest debutant since 1931 when selected to start against Bulgaria after just a handful of games in the Eredivisie and Europa League. However, it did not end well – he was at fault for both Bulgarian goals and was replaced at half-time.



Thomas DELANEY (Werder Bremen)
The bullish Danish ball-winner has been a revelation since joining Bremen from Copenhagen in January and has played a crucial role as rookie coach Alexander Nouri's side have moved away from the Bundesliga relegation zone.

Mamadou SAKHO (Crystal Palace)
The French defender, who fell out of favour with Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp, is rebuilding his reputation on loan at Palace with a string of stellar performances that helped the team move away from the relegation zone.

Anthony MODESTE (Cologne)
The one-time Blackburn Rovers flop continues to make great strides in the Bundesliga, scoring the goals – including a hat-trick against Hertha Berlin – that have taken Cologne into contention for a European place.

Sead KOLASINAC (Schalke)
The 23-year-old Bosnian left-back's performances in the Bundesliga have attracted interest from several leading Premier League clubs.

CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)
The Brazilian midfielder has played an increasingly important role this season, so much so that a suspension for a fifth yellow card was greeted with relief by Madrid as it gave him a much needed rest and allowed him to start a new yellow-card cycle just at the busiest time of the season.

Bas DOST (Sporting)
The Dutch forward has been in prolific form in the Portuguese league, with his goals taking him to the top of the ESM Golden Shoe rankings.

Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

Aggressive keepers, a major headache for FIFA

A spectre is haunting the game; the spectre of violent goalkeepers.

While it would be exaggerating to say that the authorities have entered into a holy alliance to ignore the topic, it is certainly true that they have done next to nothing to confront it – or even to admit that it is a problem.

It's not a new problem. In 1982, the German keeper Toni Schumacher brutally assaulted Patrick Battiston – Michel Platini later said: "I thought he was dead" – and while poor Battiston was rushed to hospital, Schumacher played on. Everyone was horrified, but nobody did anything about it.

Most significantly, FIFA did nothing to ensure that such carnage would not happen again. It made no changes to the rules of the game. Schumacher was not given the red card he so shamefully earned; instead goalkeepers in general were given a carte blanche, permitting them to smash into opponents and inflict horrendous injuries.

Incredibly, 35 years later, that licence to harm still exists. It remains acceptable for goalkeepers, racing forward with knee raised, to leap into opponents. It happens frequently, but it is virtually never called as a foul.

Even allowing for an attitude that goalkeepers need to be protected from injury – which they do, but only in certain actions – this is surely extreme. There is, without doubt, an unquestioned willingness among referees, and in the game at large, to be lenient with keeper excesses.

Hurt...Sint-Truiden goalkeeper William Dutoit lies injured during a Belgian league game

A new factor has entered the equation, one that almost demands FIFA wake up and take action. In a word: concussion

Take the rule against "playing in a dangerous manner". Stoop low to head the ball and that is considered dangerous play, putting your head down where feet belong, so the call goes against you even though you're the one likely to get your head kicked in. Perverse, but the logic is accepted.

But the rule is never applied to goalkeepers. When a keeper dives at the feet of an opponent, putting his head near ground level, how is that not dangerous play, for which he should be penalised?

Far from being punished, keepers who jump into the fray and smash into other players (team-mates as well as opponents), or who fling themselves at opponents' feet, are much more likely to be praised for being brave.

Agreed, bravery is involved, but it is foolhardy and dangerous bravery.

Unsurprisingly, goalkeepers think differently. When, as TV pundits, they comment on such actions, they blithely ignore the dangers. Extolling the virtues of goalkeeper Nick Rimando, who has just come racing out of his goal to punch the ball away and in doing so jumped into an opponent and left him lying dazed on the ground, former USA international goalkeeper Brad Friedel commented: "That is outstanding goalkeeping. A big strong punch, a big strong body, big collision. Exactly what you want."

Ex Columbus Crew keeper Andy Gruenebaum was equally enthusiastic about Dallas' Chris Seitz, who punched the ball away while jumping knee-first into the back of Kansas City's Dom Dwyer, saying: "He has made up his mind from square one, he's coming for this ball, that's what you're taught to do...protect yourself, you can't worry about them...I think it's great goalkeeping, but also unlucky for Dwyer to get in the way of that."

Gruenebaum says Dwyer was "unlucky to get in the way" but Dwyer was legally positioned. The rule book emphasises the point, stating: "All players have a right to their position on the field of play, being in the way of an opponent is not the same as moving into the way of an opponent."

For some, the sight of goalkeepers demolishing opponents is merely amusing. In a 2015 incident, while playing for Aston Villa, Brad Guzan smashed into Leicester's Nathan

Collision...Brad Guzan collides with Nathan Dyer of Leicester City

Dyer and knocked him out cold. The following morning's paper had no criticism of Guzan, commenting only on "Knockout Nathan" and how Guzan had "made him see stars".

FIFA's lax attitude towards such actions defies explanation. But a new factor has entered the equation, one that almost demands FIFA wake up and take action. In a word: concussion.

In the past decade we have seen tremendous advances in our knowledge of the damage that can be caused by concussions. The research continues apace, with all vigorous physical activities coming under watch. And football, as the only sport that uses the head to play the ball, is inevitably getting a lot of attention.

It is now suspected that even mild concussions can cause serious long-term problems. Caution should be the attitude of sports at the moment. And how cautious is FIFA being? Not at all. It has introduced its grandly titled "Concussion Protocol", but this is a set of tests to apply after a possible concussion incident.

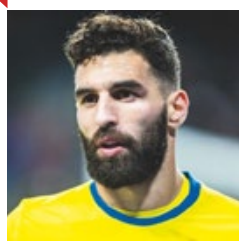
What FIFA should be doing is look at the way its sport is played, and make adjustments to reduce the possibility of concussions.

The only soccer authority that I am aware of that has made a move in that direction is the US Federation, which has banned heading in under-11 and younger age groups.

In the USA, the NFL has been forced to agree to a $1 billion class-action settlement with former players who claim to have developed various debilitating brain ailments as a result of concussions received in their playing days. And while the NFL is only dealing with the small number of pro players; FIFA has responsibility for millions of players worldwide.

At the moment FIFA has chosen the least viable response to the concussion problem, that of doing nothing. But something must be done – or the lawyers will see to it that the topic will not long remain one that can be solved within the sport. WS

Clash...Salt Lake keeper Nick Rimando crashes into Cyle Larin of Orlando City



"Our game used to totally revolve around Zlatan. Now that he has retired we've all become more responsible, we've all raised our game a couple of notches"

Sweden midfielder Jimmy Durmaz attributes the team's strong displays in World Cup qualification to the post-Ibrahimovic effect

Headliner: Ahmad

Africa's new boss

Madagascar ousts Issa Hayatou as CAF president

Issa Hayatou had not even been called back into the cavernous hall at the African Unity building in Ethiopia when the result of his re-election bid flashed on a giant video screen overhead.

The 34-20 result in favour of his opponent, Ahmad, was the first thing he saw as he was ushered back into the room amid a stunned silence as the magnitude of the stunning upset was slowly digested by the delegates and guests at the Confederation of African Football Congress.

Then, after a pregnant pause, came a burst of cheers from amid the ranks of the voters; loud, almost disbelieving, yelps of victory.

Hayatou was momentarily stunned as he saw the result on the scoreboard, confirmation of his worst fears as his long-standing tenure at the helm of the African game came to a crashing end.

"Hayatou misread the impact of the multiple changes in FA presidents in the preceding years"

He kept his composure long enough to retake his post at the centre of the podium and resume duties as chair of the meeting, while Ahmad was swept towards the stage on the shoulders of his supporters.

Victory for the former government minister from Madagascar had not seemed plausible just weeks before. But, on the eve of the election, there was a sudden turning of the tide that meant many thought he might prove at least competitive. But tumbling the 70-year-old Hayatou from his throne seemed most unlikely – even if the CAF president looked tired, frail and had stumbled his way through the early part of Congress, muddling up items on the agenda as if to reinforce the need for a change.

The CAF elections in Addis Ababa on March 16 marked only the third time since 1988 that the all-powerful president had been challenged. The previous two occasions proved to be routs as his opponents barely managed to raise a half dozen.

Hayatou's last two re-elections, to a sixth and seventh term in office, were confirmed by popular acclaim with no opponent willing to be consigned to the wilderness by daring to cross the chief.

It had been supposedly made even easier for Hayatou to keep control after a sycophantic Congress in 2012 passed a bizarre ruling that disqualified all but members of the 15-man CAF executive committee from standing for president. "For the experience," it was rationalised at the time.

The decision of Ahmad, who uses just one name as is custom among many Malagasy, to stand against Hayatou seemed suicidal, and in the days after his candidacy was announced the former government minister was to be found sitting on his own at meal times in the Libreville hotel where the CAF hierarchy were ensconced for the three weeks of this year's African Nations Cup finals.

But when Gianni Infantino held a summit of football association presidents in Johannesburg a fortnight after the tournament, conspiracy theories were spinning out of control and the possibility

Victorious...Ahmad is carried aloft by his supporters

of a decent challenge to Hayatou's authority looked plausible. The FIFA president made every public pretence of staying above the fray, but behind the scenes he made clear Zurich's desire for change. Hayatou's backing of the losing horse in the FIFA election a year earlier was coming back to haunt him.

Hayatou was forced out of his lethargy into full campaign mode in the last weeks before the election but still felt confident enough not to bother addressing the Congress just before the voting, even after Ahmad had asked to and delivered a surprisingly rousing speech.

By all accounts, victory was secured the night before when Ahmad's camp gathered a total of 26 presidents together for a late-night hotel meeting as canvassing went on through the early hours. Those numbers tilted the undecided in his favour, although even Ahmad's closest allies were stunned by the margin of his victory.

Hayatou misread the impact of the multiple changes in FA presidents in the preceding years with a new constituency of younger officials seeking change. A patronising style also did not endear him to the younger generation.

Infantino's elections and subsequent clear out at FIFA HQ was also a strong signal change was brewing.

But it remains a shock election win, one never before seen at any confederation level, thrusting into power a novice from a footballing backwater who now holds the hopes that the African game will catch up and then move with the times.

Mark Gleeson

Beaten...Issa Hayatou

MOVERS & SHAKERS

Keeping tabs on the blazers

MARIOS LEFKARITIS

The Cypriot stood down as a UEFA Executive Committee member after 21 years. He had previously decided not to stand for re-election to the FIFA Council, where he has been a member since 2002. The 70-year-old attracted controversy in 2013 when it was reported that his family was paid £27m for a piece of land by the Qatar Investment Authority. Lefkaritis is believed to have voted for Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup.

VITALY MUTKO

The Russian deputy prime minister, who is also head of the Russian Football Union, has been barred from standing for re-election for a place on the FIFA Council after he failed an eligibility test carried out by the FIFA review committee. It is believed he has been barred because his ministerial role contravened the statutes of the global football body and that the decision was not connected to the doping scandal which has engulfed Russian sport.

Barred...Mutko

JOSEPH ODARTEI LAMPTEY

The Ghanaian referee has been banned for life by FIFA after being found guilty of influencing the result of a World Cup qualifying match, incorrectly awarding a penalty during a qualifier between South Africa and Senegal last November. South Africa won 2-1 but the first of their goals came from a spot-kick awarded by Lamptey for a controversial handball. The ball hit Senegal defender Kalidou Koulibaly on the leg, but, despite no appeals, Lamptey pointed to the spot, to the incredulity of the Senegal team.

New boss...Claudio Tapia

First time...John Delaney (centre)

JOHN DELANEY

The chief executive of the Football Association of Ireland was elected to the UEFA executive committee for the first time at the UEFA Congress in Helsinki. Delaney received the second highest number of votes, 48, two fewer than Sweden's Karl-Erik Nilsson, while former Manchester United boss David Gill came sixth with 40 votes from UEFA's 55 member associations.

The five other successful candidates were former Juventus and Poland star Zbigniew Boniek, German FA president Reinhard Grindel, Italian FA director Michele Uva, Dutch FA president Michael Van Praag and Turkey's Servet Yardimci. They will serve four-year terms.

Grindel was also elected as one of UEFA's representatives on the FIFA Council, along with Sandor Csanyi (Hungary), Costakis Koutsokoumnis (Cyprus) and Dejan Savicevic (Montenegro).

BRAYAN JIMENEZ

The former Guatemalan football chief was banned for life for offences which included "bribery and corruption".

A former member of a FIFA committee for fair play and social responsibility, he pleaded guilty to racketeering and corruption charges before a US judge in July last year.

CLAUDIO TAPIA

Tapia was elected as the new president of the Argentinian Football Association with 40 of the 43 votes in his favour.

Luis Segura, who replaced the long-standing AFA president Julio Grondona when he died in 2014, was forced to resign his position after being charged with fraud in June 2016.

"Money does not rule"

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin insists Europe's rich clubs will not hold UEFA to ransom and announces a €1m "solidarity" payment to each member nation

Headliner: Mahmoud Dahoud

The law of the jungle

Dortmund raid Gladbach for club's brightest young talent

In yet another example of their penchant for recruiting their brightest and best youngsters, Borussia Dortmund have completed a €12million deal with Borussia Monchengladbach for coveted Germany under-21 midfielder Mahmoud Dahoud, who will head to the Ruhr on a five-year deal this summer.

Born in Syria but brought up from an early age in the Rhineland, the 21-year-old had been linked with a host of leading Premier League sides. But, in the end, he simply could not say no to the mouth-watering *Schwarz-Gelben* prospectus – with their reputation for polishing diamonds, Champions League opportunities, an electric atmosphere at the Westfalenstadion and, last but by no means least, the chance to work under Thomas Tuchel, one of the most progressive coaches in the business.

Dahoud, whose contract with Gladbach was due to expire in 2018, can help the Dortmunder in so many ways. A box-to-box operative, he plays with dynamism, drive and tenacity; has a tremendous range of pass; runs strongly with the ball; and, as he proved when firing home from distance in a recent Europa League tie against Schalke, packs the kick of a mule in his right boot.

That said, he is far from the finished article. At times, his game lacks discipline as well as clarity, and in contrast to his stellar efforts of last season he has flattered to deceive for much of this campaign, possibly distracted by all the transfer talk.

A product of Gladbach's youth system – he was first inducted into the club's academy at the age of 14 – he will need to be on his mettle from the very start at his new club. In Gonzalo Castro, Julian Weigl, Raphael Guerreiro, Shinji Kagawa and Sebastian Rode, Dortmund already have a surfeit of central-midfield class in their ranks and the last thing he will be given is a free ride.

> "In the past, we've always managed to successfully fill the gaps. We'll be looking to invest the money from the Dahoud sale in a quality replacement"
>
> **Gladbach general manager, Max Eberl**

One to watch... Dahoud holding off Geis of Schalke

What has developed over the years in the Bundesliga is a well-defined transfer food chain. This means that Bayern Munich lure away the cream of the crop from Dortmund (Robert Lewandowski, Mario Gotze, Mats Hummels), while Dortmund raid Gladbach for the next big thing (striker Heiko Herrlich in 1995, wing-wizard Marco Reus in 2012 and now Dahoud). And that then leaves Gladbach to take up the slack with a Freiburg, Hanover or Werder Bremen leading light. It is the law of the jungle.

"It's a pity we've lost a great prospect," declared Gladbach general manager Max Eberl. "However, in the past, we've always managed to successfully fill the gaps.

"We'll be looking to invest the money from the Dahoud sale in a quality replacement. I think this transfer shows that we're doing a good job.

"Our mission is to develop our own talent and stay competitive."

Rumoured to be at the top of Eberl's shopping list is the highly promising Hoffenheim midfielder Nadiem Amiri, a 20-year-old German of Afghan descent who has been attracting plenty of overseas attention. And with Tottenham Hotspur and Atletico Madrid reported to be keen, Gladbach had better move quickly.

Nick Bidwell

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	23
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	12
Gianluigi BUFFON (Juventus)	9
Gianluigi DONNARUMMA (Milan)	9
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	7
Kasper SCHMEICHEL (Leicester City)	6
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	3
Manuel NEUER (Bayern Munich)	3
Iker CASILLAS (Porto)	2
EDERSON (Benfica)	2
Diego ALVES (Valencia)	1
Willy CABALLERO (Manchester City)	1
Timo HORN (Cologne)	1
Brad JONES (Feyenoord)	1
Bernd LENO (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Simon MIGNOLET (Liverpool)	1
Keylor NAVAS (Real Madrid)	1
Rui PATRICIO (Sporting)	1
Yann SOMMER (B-Monchengladbach)	1
Maarten STEKELENBURG (Everton)	1
Danijel SUBASIC (Monaco)	1
Wojciech SZCZESNY (Roma)	1
Javi VARAS (Las Palmas)	1

DEFENDERS

Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	28
David LUIZ (Chelsea)	22
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	13
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	13
Philipp LAHM (Bayern Munich)	11
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	11
Alex SANDRO (Juventus)	11
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	10
Filipe LUIS (Atletico Madrid)	10
Djibril SIDIBE (Monaco)	10
Benjamin MENDY (Monaco)	9
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	9
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	8
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	8
Rapahel VARANE (Real Madrid)	8
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	7
Dani ALVES (Juventus)	7
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	7
Laurent KOSCIELNY (Arsenal)	7
Victor MOSES (Chelsea)	6
Samuel UMTITI (Barcelona)	6
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	5
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	5
Raphael GUERRERO (Borussia Dortmund)	5
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	5
Stefan SAVIC (Atletico Madrid)	5
Hector BELLERIN (Arsenal)	4
Gary CAHILL (Chelsea)	4
Mattia CALDARA (Atalanta)	4
Kamil GLIK (Monaco)	4
Sead KOLASINAC (Schalke)	4
James MILNER (Liverpool)	4
Daniele RUGANI (Juventus)	4
Antonio VALENCIA (Manchester United)	4
Kyle WALKER (Tottenham Hotspur)	4
Toby ALDERWEIRELD (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Daniel CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	3
Nathaniel CLYNE (Liverpool)	3
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
MIRANDA (Internazionale)	3
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (B D'mund)	3
Nicolas PAREJA (Sevilla)	3
Ricardo PEREIRA (Nice)	3
Federico FAZIO (Roma)	2
Kostas MANOLAS (Roma)	2
Shkodran MUSTAFI (Arsenal)	2
PEPE (Real Madrid)	2
Marcel SCHMELZER (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Raul ALBIOL (Napoli)	1
Kwadwo ASAMOAH (Juventus)	1
Eric BAILLY (Manchester United)	1
Leighton BAINES (Everton)	1
Andrea BARZAGLI (Juventus)	1
Joao CANCELO (Valencia)	1
Seamus COLEMAN (Everton)	1
Danilo D'AMBROSIO (Internazionale)	1
DANILO (Real Madrid)	1
DANTE (Nice)	1
Stefan DE VRIJ (Lazio)	1
FELIPE (Porto)	1
Jonas HECTOR (Cologne)	1
Benedikt HOWEDES (Schalke)	1
Stefan ILSANKER (RB Leipzig)	1
Branislav IVANOVIC (Chelsea)	1
JEMERSON (Monaco)	1
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
JUANFRAN (Atletico Madrid)	1
Presnel KIMPEMBE (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
MARIANO (Sevilla)	1
Inigo MARTINEZ (Real Sociedad)	1
Javi MARTINEZ (Bayern Munich)	1
Joel MATIP (Liverpool)	1
Gabriel MERCADO (Sevilla)	1
NACHO (Real Madrid)	1
Cesar NAVAS (Rostov)	1
Kyriakos PAPADOPOULOS (Hamburg)	1
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Winston REID (West Ham United)	1
Marcel RISSE (Cologne)	1
Antonio RUDIGER (Roma)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Benfica)	1
Kostas STAFYLIDIS (Augsburg)	1
Jan VERTONGHEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Jesus VALLEJO (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Virgil VAN DIJK (Southampton)	1

MIDFIELDERS

THIAGO Alcantara (Bayern Munich)	22
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	21
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	15
Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	11
Dele ALLI (Tottenham Hotspur)	10
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	9
Emil FORSBERG (RB Leipzig)	9
Bernardo SILVA (Monaco)	8
Yannick FERREIRA CARRASCO (At Madrid)	7
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	7
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	7
Radja NAINGGOLAN (Roma)	7
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Adam LALLANA (Liverpool)	5
Steven N'ZONZI (Sevilla)	5
SON Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	5
Tiemoue BAKAYOKO (Monaco)	4
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	4
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	4
FABINHO (Monaco)	4
Naby KEITA (RB Leipzig)	4
Toni KROOS (Real Madrid)	4
Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	4
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	4
Arjen ROBBEN (Bayern Munich)	4
SUSO (Milan)	4
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Blaise MATUIDI (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Paul POGBA (Manchester United)	3
Adrien RABIOT (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
ARDA Turan (Barcelona)	2
Julian DRAXLER (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	2
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Manchester City)	2
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	2
JOAO MARIO (Internazionale)	2
Stevan JOVETIC (Sevilla)	2
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	2
KOKE (Atletico Madrid)	2
Mateo KOVACIC (Real Madrid)	2
Manuel LOCATELLI (Milan)	2
Henrikh MKHITARYAN (Manchester United)	2
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	2
SAUL Niguez (Atletico Madrid)	2
Lars STINDL (Borussia Monchengladbach)	2
Julian WEIGL (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	2
Marc ALBRIGHTON (Leicester City)	1
Felipe ANDERSON (Lazio)	1
Karim EL AHMADI (Feyenoord)	1
Michael CARRICK (Manchester United)	1
DANILO (Porto)	1
Thomas DELANEY (Werder Bremen)	1
Cesc FABREGAS (Chelsea)	1
GABI (Atletico Madrid)	1
Jordan HENDERSON (Liverpool)	1
Vicente IBORRA (Sevilla)	1
ISCO (Real Madrid)	1
Riyad MAHREZ (Leicester City)	1
Gelson MARTINS (Sporting)	1
PIZZI (Benfica)	1
Christian PULISIC (Borussia Dortmund)	1
RAFINHA (Barcelona)	1
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Franck RIBERY (Bayern Munich)	1
Mohamed SALAH (Roma)	1
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	1
Jean SERI (Nice)	1
Gylfi SIGURDSSON (Swansea City)	1
Corentin TOLISSO (Lyon)	1
Arturo VIDAL (Bayern Munich)	1
Tonny VILHENA (Feyenoord)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	27
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	21
Zlatan IBRAHIMOVIC (Man United)	19
Edin DZEKO (Roma)	17
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	13
Cristiano RONALDO (Real Madrid)	13
Diego COSTA (Chelsea)	12
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	12
Gonzalo HIGUAIN (Juventus)	11
Kylian MBAPPE (Monaco)	11
NEYMAR (Barcelona)	11
Anthony MODESTE (Cologne)	10
Alexis SANCHEZ (Arsenal)	10
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	7
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	7
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	6
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	6
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (B Dort)	5
Antoine GRIEZMANN (Atletico Madrid)	5
Arkadiusz MILIK (Napoli)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	4
Ousmane DEMBELE (Borussia Dortmund)	4
Theo WALCOTT (Arsenal)	3
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	3
Mario BALOTELLI (Nice)	2
Bas DOST (Sporting)	2
Olivier GIROUD (Arsenal)	2
Romelu LUKAKU (Everton)	2
PEDRO (Chelsea)	2
Andrea BELOTTI (Torino)	1
Karim BENZEMA (Real Madrid)	1
Jose CALLEJON (Napoli)	1
Douglas COSTA (Bayern Munich)	1
Valere GERMAIN (Monaco)	1
Mario GOMEZ (Wolfsburg)	1
Javier HERNANDEZ (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	1
Alexandre LACAZETTE (Lyon)	1
Anthony MARTIAL (Manchester United)	1
Alvaro MORATA (Real Madrid)	1
Konstantinos MITROGLU (Benfica)	1
Ivan PERISIC (Internazionale)	1
Wayne ROONEY (Manchester United)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1
Jamie VARDY (Leicester City)	1

"A victory no longer represents the moon. Nor does a defeat stand for hell"

In an interview with *France Football*, Jose Mourinho claims he has become more philosophical

HEADLINER: Hugo Broos

Boss to stay put

African Nations Cup-winning coach sticks it out with Cameroon

When the African champions Cameroon went down for lunch before their friendly against Guinea in Brussels in March, the hotel staff turned them away. Their bills had not been paid and so no pre-match meal was on offer.

A day after the game, full-back Ambroise Oyongo was stuck at the airport, with his plane ticket back to Montreal Impact of MLS yet to be paid for by the Cameroon federation. He eventually got back for training two days later than scheduled.

While these might not be among the most extreme examples of the ineptitude of some African football federations, for the newly crowned continental champions to have to suffer such indignities is certainly a low.

> "I had hoped that the victory in the Nations Cup would change things – but we quickly fall back into our organisational problems"
>
> Cameroon coach Hugo Broos

It also did not sit well with their coach, Hugo Broos, who was indignant at the poor administration as he set about preparing his side to compete at June's Confederations Cup in Russia, having led an unfancied squad to African Nations Cup success just six weeks earlier.

Broos launched into a tirade against his employers ahead of the match in Belgium, but subsequently backtracked on his return to Yaounde, even going as far as to apologise for "perhaps humiliating the people of Cameroon".

With the trip to Russia on the horizon, and Cameroon hosting the next Nations Cup finals, Broos is in no rush to end an exciting adventure. He says he is even in talks about extending a contract which runs out in January, even though he was not paid for seven months.

That complaint was not one Broos aired himself in his original tirade, which came as a major embarrassment to Cameroon so soon after winning the Nations Cup in Gabon.

"When I walked into the dining room I saw that nothing was ready," says Broos. "I joked then to my team manager that we probably haven't paid the bill, only a few minutes later to discover that was actually the case.

"I was really embarrassed. I'd never experienced anything like that before. This was a real wake-up call. I really wonder if I can continue. I had hoped that the victory in the Nations Cup would change things – but we quickly fall back into our organisational problems."

Broos also made reference to a training camp in Nantes last year, when the team doctor himself had to buy medication and bandages.

On the issue of his salary, Broos said: "This has now been settled, though we did talk about a little more than seven months' salary. But I especially want to speak for the whole group.

"The things that happen, they are so unprofessional.

"I do not like to leave, but if there are no guarantees, I do not know if I can continue as coach."

His own federation president was said to be "shocked", and the Cameroon government, clearly embarrassed, called for an inquiry. "My outburst has had an impact in Cameroon and that was my intention," added Broos. "Everyone is awake and we had a good conversation."

Mark Gleeson

In charge...Hugo Broos takes training

"I used some photos of Cristiano Ronaldo that I found on the internet, nothing specific. I put the photos next to me and started working on the bust"

Emanuel Santos explains how he made his cast of the player, which is on display at the re-named Cristiano Ronaldo Madeira International Airport

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Fire...Bastian Schweinsteiger

EUROPE

TAKIS LEMONIS was appointed coach of Greek Superleague leaders Olympiakos for a third time.

Sweden defender **JONAS OLSSON** left West Bromwich Albion to sign for Djurgarden in his homeland.

Former England defender **JONATHAN WOODGATE** returned to his old club side Middlesbrough as first-team coach.

Scottish Premiership side Motherwell named **STEPHEN ROBINSON** as manager following the sacking of Mark McGhee.

CONCACAF

Former Germany captain **BASTIAN SCHWEINSTEIGER**, who led his country to World Cup success in 2014, joined MLS side Chicago Fire from Manchester United on a one-year deal.

MIKE PETKE took over from Jeff Cassar as coach of MLS side Real Salt Lake.

Ecuadorian **OCTAVIO ZAMBRANO** replaced Benito Floro as coach of Canada.

AFRICA

KWESI APPIAH, who led Ghana at the 2014 World Cup, was reappointed national coach, succeeding Avram Grant.

RONNY VAN GENEUGDEN was named coach of Malawi, **NICOLAS DUPUIS** took over Madagascar, Sao Tome appointed **GUSTAVO CLEMENTE** and **MOUSSA GHASSOUM** was given the Mauritius job.

AUGUSTO INACIO, who won the Portuguese League Cup with Moreirense in January, took charge of Egyptian side Zamalek.

ASIA

ROY HODGSON will work with Melbourne City on a consultancy basis for the rest of the Australian season. It will be his first job since standing down as England manager in the wake of the Euro 2016 defeat by Iceland.

Ex-England striker **CARLTON COLE** and former Chelsea midfielder **MICHAEL ESSIEN** joined Indonesian side Persib Bandung. Nigeria's **PETER ODEMWINGIE** joined rivals Madura United.

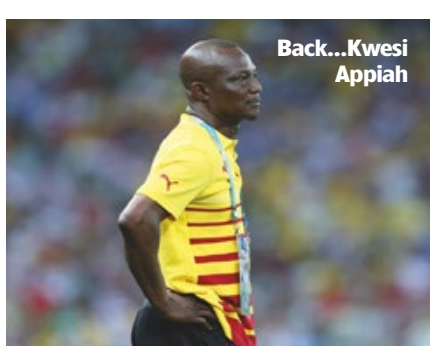
Argentinian coach **MARIO GOMEZ** took charge of Malaysia.

New start...Marc Wilmots

Ivory Coast turn to Wilmots

Former Belgium coach **MARC WILMOTS** took charge of Ivory Coast, succeeding Michel Dussuyer who resigned after the African Nations Cup finals in January.

WIlmots left Belgium after their defeat to Wales in the quarter-finals of Euro 2016.



Back...Kwesi Appiah

End in sight... Dick Advocaat

Advocaat advocates retirement this summer

DICK ADVOCAAT, who had two stints in charge of the Dutch national side, has announced that he will retire when he leaves Fenerbahce at the end of the Turkish season.

OUT

EUROPE

DANNY BLIND was sacked as Holland coach after the team slipped to fourth place in their World Cup qualifying group.

Brazilian-born **KEVIN KURANYI**, who won 52 caps for Germany, has retired, aged 35.

Coach **QUIQUE SETIEN** will leave Spanish side Las Palmas at the end of this campaign.

AFRICA

Tunisia sacked coach **HENRYK KASPERCZAK**, who had returned for a second spell in 2015.

After just a month in charge, French coach **THIERRY FROGER** parted company with DR Congo's TP Mazembe.

ASIA

MAHDI ALI resigned after five years in charge of United Arab Emirates, while **KIATISUK SENAMUANG** quit Thailand.

Over...Kevin Kuranyi

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Head injuries remain a grave concern for the game

To head or not to head, that is the question. With such distinguished sufferers from dementia memory loss as Nobby Stiles, Martin Peters and Ray Wilson, and the shocking example of Jeff Astle, no wonder there is general alarm and calls for a massive investigation.

A television programme on the problem was fronted by Alan Shearer, who happens to be an example of a well-known header of the ball who has not been affected. Gordon Taylor and his Professional Footballers Association have been criticised for not being more pro-active and only now are they proposing a thorough investigation.

Yet what good could it do, whoever happens to initiate it?

All it will discover, I believe, however much it costs and however long it lasts, is that some players are liable to the conditions, others are not.

Invaluable...Geoff Hurst in action for England at the 1970 World Cup

Revered...former England centre-forward G O Smith

Of the 1966 World Cup-winning England team, you don't hear of Geoff Hurst, header of invaluable goals, being affected. Long ago, Dixie Dean of Everton once scored 60 goals in one first division season and was a formidable header of the ball, knocking in 349 goals for the club. He was a fully alert and fluent figure when I met him at the Cafe Royal at a reception following an England match many decades later.

As against that, the amateur G O Smith – one of the most revered of England centre-forwards and eulogised even by such a prolific professional as Steve Bloomer – not only never headed the ball, but stated that when a team began to do so things were going wrong!

The only logical conclusion that even the longest, drawn out, widest survey can draw is that some players are liable to brain damage, others are not.

So what is to be done? The only certain response would be to ban heading altogether, but given its longevity and the thousands upon thousands of goals it has produced over the years, the backlash would be enormous.

> The logical conclusion is some players are liable to brain damage, others are not

In an ideal world, one in which we will never live, I suppose some scientific means could be worked out whereby players are examined to discover what propensity they have for brain damage.

It is a deeply worrying situation and I wish I could discern some way out of it, other than the ban on heading.

The talent is still there for England

We are often told that England are not producing international talent and the problem of home-born players is surely exacerbated when a club like Chelsea can have some 38 young players out on loan, many of them abroad.

Winning title after title at youth level becomes a sheer irrelevance when you see how few of those involved ever manage to reach the first team. Even when they do, the solitary major example of John Terry being unique enough to be a freak, they seldom stay long.

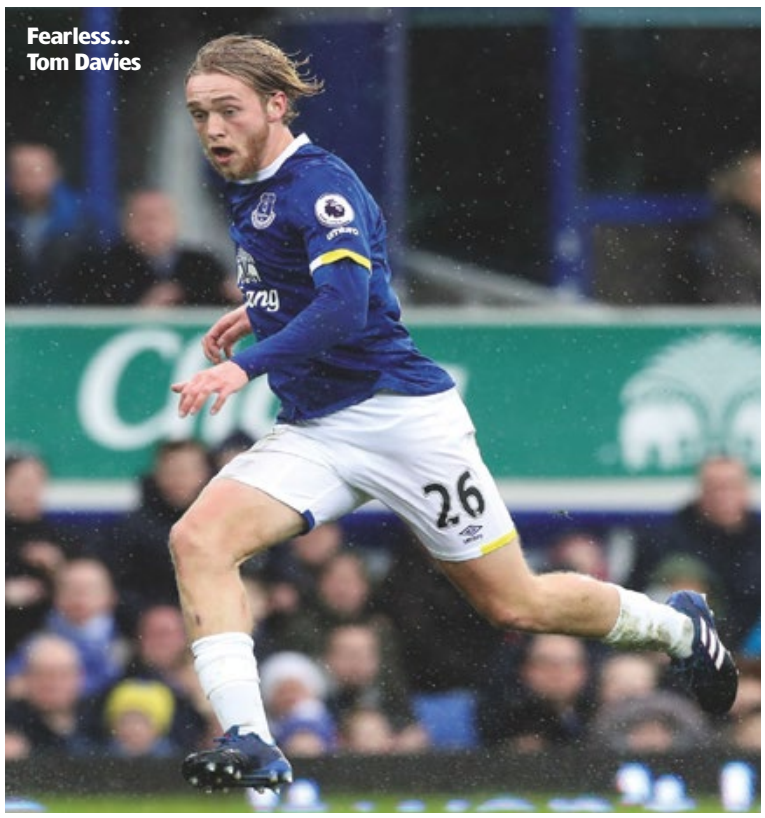
Chelsea's Ruben Loftus-Cheek will reportedly go out somewhere on loan at the end of the season. With the England Under-21 side he has recently looked a dominant and influential figure, but he has made sporadic appearances for his club, usually as a substitute. With such a phenomenal quantum of expensive foreign talent in the team, what hope is there for him?

Elsewhere, fortunately, young talent has been breaking through this season.

I have admired the skills, speed and virtuosity of Demarai Gray, the 21-year-old Leicester City winger, while Everton's 18-year-old Tom Davies is gifted and effective from either flank.

England badly need wingers and it is not inconceivable that these two could operate successfully in the ensuing World Cup finals, which England are sure to reach but, on current and recent form, show few signs of making more than their customary scant progress.

Davies is a fearlessly precocious attacker and one feels that playing for England would not restrain him. Yet even Stanley Matthews was once accused of lacking the big match temperament!


Fearless... Tom Davies

Advice..Bracewell Smith (left)

Arsenal suffering from Kroenke's lack of knowledge

At administrative level, Arsenal seem to be in the same state of turmoil as the team, with a number of senior administrators likely to be on their way.

Club supremo Stan Kroenke is an immensely shrewd and wealthy American businessman with all sorts of important sporting franchises, but soccer?

Till quite recently he was drawing £3million out of the club for supposed advice, but would it be fair to impugn him for a lack of knowledge in the game?

I remember, with no nostalgia, a previous Arsenal chairman, Bracewell Smith. The club's Welsh goalkeeper Jack Kelsey once told me that Smith had taken to coming down to the dressing room to address the team before a game.

"He gives us advice," said Kelsey. "Silly little things, like pass to a man."

Nowadays at top level the average director tends to come from the Far East.

Mourinho's changing opinion about Shaw

After Luke Shaw made an appearance as a substitute for the England team that lost in Germany, his club manager at Manchester United, Joe Mourinho, tore into him mercilessly.

According to Mourinho, Shaw could not, he was told, compare himself to his colleagues "in the way he trains, the way he commits, the focus, the ambition".

He was duly dropped from United's next game, against Everton, and seemed to be about fifth in line among United's left-backs. But then the cloud suddenly cleared, and there was Shaw, back in the first team and operating with success.

You might say that, not for the first time Mourinho had proved himself a shrewd psychologist.

For my part, I am delighted to see Shaw back in action and challenging for a place as the England left-back which would surely have long been his were it not for the brutal and horrific foul he suffered playing in Holland which put him out of the game for months on end.

He cost United £24million when they bought him from Southampton and, with his pace, strength and mobility, he seemed odds on not only to succeed at United but to find a permanent place in the England team.

Mourinho has questioned Shaw's "attitude", criticised him in public, and it has also been reported that he would be ready to sell him at the end of the season. Now perhaps he will think again.

It is surely not unreasonable to surmise that all Shaw needed was plenty of time to get over the effects of that appalling injury.

Mind games...Jose Mourinho and Shaw

No way out for Moyes

In these days of ardent feminism, there was no way the beleaguered Sunderland manager David Moyes was to emerge unscathed from his ill-judged – however supposedly jocular – warning to the interviewing BBC journalist Vicki Sparks, whom he "jestingly" threatened to slap were she to repeat the kind of question she quite properly and professionally asked him after Sunderland's goalless draw against Burnley.

Did he, Moyes was asked, feel increasing pressure from the fact that the club's American owner Ellis Short was watching from the stand? That Ms Sparks joined in his laughter was of small significance since it seemed to be the product of embarrassment.

Even when he apologized, Moyes could not even refer to Ms Sparks by name but merely as "the girl".

The local BBC seemed to do their best to ignore the incident, but out it inevitably came. Not a world shaking event but a displeasing one.

Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

PRO:DIRECT

LEATHER FOREVER

It has been worn by some of the greatest players ever to play the beautiful game. It provides a unique combination of soft responsive touch on the ball, supreme natural feel and glove-like fit. It continues to enjoy enduring popularity. Always has. Always will.

Still here and still relevant in the modern game, we have curated a collection of the very best boots available that utilise this material. Boots like the adidas Copa Gloro – the successor to the fastest-selling boot in Pro:Direct history – the timeless PUMA King, and the super-lightweight Mizuno Morelia Neo II.

For unrivalled comfort. For unparallelled fit. For unmatched touch. Forever Leather.

CLASSIC: PUMA KING TOP K DI

The boot that's ruled the pitch for decades features supple and thin K-Leather, a quilted vamp, GripTex ankle lining and distinctive foldover tongue.

MODERN: ADIDAS COPA GLORO 17

Combining a soft Taurus calf leather upper with a classic Predator-inspired colourway and foldover tongue for a boot that's deadly in every department.

LIGHTWEIGHT: MORELIA NEO II JAPAN

Handcrafted in Japan from premium grade kangaroo leather and lasted for 24 hours for the ultimate fit, this boot is made to exacting pro standards.

CLASSIC

PUMA KING TOP K DI FG
QR: 106462 - **£106**

DIADORA BRASIL ITALY OG
QR: 148940 - **£190**

PANTOFOLA D'ORO EMIDIO ITALIA VITELLO FG
QR: 134045 - **£120**

UMBRO SPECIALI ETERNAL PRO HG
QR: 106569 - **£72**

MODERN

ADIDAS COPA GLORO 17 FG
QR: 144719 - **£80**

NIKE TIEMPO LEGEND VI FG
QR: 150207 - **£160**

PUMA EVOTOUCH PRO FG
QR: 141349 - **£170**

LOTTO STADIO 100 FG
QR: 134577 - **£88**

LIGHTWEIGHT

MIZUNO MORELIA NEO II JAPAN FG
QR: 133438 - **£200**

CONCAVE HALO+ LEATHER FG
QR: 141891 - **£104**

NIKE HYPERVENOM PHANTOM III TECH CRAFT FG
QR: 150212 - **£200**

PUMA EVOSPEED 17 SL K-LEATHER FG
QR: 141365 - **£200**

PRODUCT DOCTOR

LEATHER TLC: STEP BY STEP GUIDE

1 For best results clean immediately after use. First remove any mud or debris by banging your boots together soleplate to soleplate. Remove the laces and wash separately if very dirty otherwise simply loosen them and put your hand inside. Brush off your boots using a brush with soft natural bristles.

2 With warm water and a cloth, wipe over to get rid of any remaining mud and dirt. Use an old toothbrush to clean out grooves around any stitchlines on the upper and in the soleplate. Dry with a towel.

3 Stuff them with newspaper which will absorb excess water as the boots dry out and assist shape retention of the leather. Replace the newspaper at regular intervals if the boots are soaking wet. Allow to dry naturally. Never put them in the sun, by a radiator, fire or other heat source or use a hairdryer as this will cause the leather to crack and fade and will reduce the life cycle of your boots.

4 Once boots have thoroughly dried out, apply leather food or dubbin and allow sufficient time to let it absorb into the leather. Buff with a soft cloth or rag until the leather develops a noticeable shine. Now they're ready for another 90 minutes.

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

GEORGIA

Last throw of the dice for Georgian football

New-look league hopes to boost investment and stop the drift to rugby

Tskhinvali have gone missing. But while established clubs vanishing in eastern Europe is not unusual, this is different.

The second-tier side, founded by exiles from the South Ossetian region that broke away from Georgia with Soviet help in 2004, are supposed to be hosting Merani Martvili at Tbilisi's Mikheil Meskhi Stadium. Even members of the Georgian Football Federation (GFF) think Tskhinvali are playing at the Meskhi. Instead, unnoticed by virtually everyone except Tskhinvali's management, the club has decamped 25km away to the industrial city of Rustavi.

And the reason is simple: Tskhinvali can play three games at Rustavi's Poladi Stadium for the price of one at the Meskhi.

Tskhinvali played in last season's Europa League qualifiers and were part of the top flight until relegation last term. Now, like so many Georgian sides, they are up for sale. There are, however, no buyers and the club's general director, David Tsabadze, admits: "We have financial problems."

While Tskhinvali's status as a symbol of Georgia's continued claims on South Ossetia is different, everything else about the club is synonymous with the dire state of Georgian club football. Their matches are played during the day because floodlights are too expensive, the crowds are tiny despite entry being free and without state support the club would not exist.

Although teams are full time, outside the top flight a player's salary can be as little as $50 a month according to Beso Abashidze, who is the leader of the players' union. Treatment can be poor, with wages often paid two or three months late, and Abashidze is currently lobbying for insurance, standard contracts and a minimum wage.

And it is problems such as these that create weaknesses, particularly in the second tier, which allow the match fixers to prosper.

Last year, the GFF relegated Betlemi Keda and handed life bans to four players, along with assistant coach Roman Kobuladze. A shadowy ringleader was also banned from attending games but, as match fixing is not a crime in Georgia, he remains on the loose and the problem has not gone away.

Given the nation's rich playing heritage – from Aleksandr Chivadze and David Kipiani, to Georgi Kinkladze and Kakha Kaladze – the state of the Georgian club game is heart-breaking.

Chivadze and Kipiani were stalwarts in the Soviet team and their club side, Dinamo Tbilisi, were one of the most exciting in Europe in the late 1970s and went on to win the 1981 European Cup-winners Cup.

After independence in 1991, Georgian football initially held up, with Dinamo qualifying for the 2004-05 UEFA Cup group stage. Today, club sides do well to get through a round of qualifying and rugby union is now winning over many Georgian sports fans.

The national rugby side have qualified for the last three Rugby World Cups and, by virtue of their strong performance at the last tournament, in England in 2015, they are guaranteed a place at the next World Cup, in Japan in 2019.

Evidence of rugby's ascendancy is

Moved...Tskhinvali (in blue) host Merani Martvili at the Poladi Stadium in Rustavi

Exciting...the Dinamo Tbilisi team that won the 1981 Cup-winners Cup

Legend...a stone honouring Georgi Kinkladze outside the Mikheil Meskhi Stadium in Tbilisi

illustrated by the fate of the Shevardeni Stadium. A decade ago it was a football ground; now, Shevardeni FC languish in the third tier and the arena is used as a training base for the rugby side, who fill the 55,000-capacity Dinamo Arena for games against Russia and Romania.

"We are seeing a lot of parents coming to us with their children," says national rugby coach, Milton Haig. "It's overtaking football at the grass roots."

Meanwhile, his football counterpart, Vladimir Weiss, is under pressure. A 1-0 friendly win over Spain in June showed progress, but the team are unlikely to qualify for Russia next year.

The domestic game is crying out for change – and a new GFF administration, led by ex international Levan Kobiashvili is finally trying to implement it.

The old 16-team domestic league structure has been ditched, along with the name and even the season calendar. In its place is the new 10-team Erovnuli

> "Before when our clubs were playing in European qualifying, it was at the start of our season...now when we play in Europe we will have settled teams"
>
> **GFF vice-president Nika Jgarkava**

Winner... Tornike Okriashvili (no10) celebrates scoring against Spain in 2016

EROVNULI LIGA: 2017

1 Chikhura Sachkhere
2 Dila Gori
3 Dinamo Batumi
4 Dinamo Tbilisi
Lokomotiv Tbilisi
Saburtalo Tbilisi
5 Kolkheti Poti
6 Samtredia
7 Shukura Kobuleti
8 Torpedo Kutaisi

CHIKHURA SACHKHERE
From western Georgia, they play in Zestaponi due to an inadequate home ground. Reached the Georgian Cup Final in 2013 and 2014, but lost on both occasions.

DILA GORI
Dila won the Georgian Cup in 2012 and the league in 2015. The club was recently acquired by a group of Israeli sports agents.

DINAMO BATUMI
Founded in 1923 and based in the Black Sea port of Batumi, near the breakaway state of Abkhazia. Publicly funded, they qualified for the Europa League last season.

DINAMO TBILISI
The club's legendary side of the late 1970s and early 1980s are a benchmark no subsequent team can match. Soviet Higher League winners in 1964 and again in 1978 – when they went on to beat Liverpool in the following season's European Cup.

KOLKHETI POTI
One of Georgia's oldest clubs, dating back to 1913, they are a state-funded side from the port of Poti. They qualified for the UEFA Cup in 1998 and 1999 but have had little success since.

LOKOMOTIV TBILISI
Founded in 1936 as a works side for Georgian railways and now owned by Silk Road Group, whose interests range from hotels to the Silk Net internet business.

SABURTALO TBILISI
From a suburb of Tbilisi, they were founded in 1999 and won promotion to the top flight in 2015. Previously owned by GFF vice-president Kakha Chumburidze, they are now controlled by sports minister Tariel Khechikashvili.

SAMTREDIA
The 2016 transitional championship was their first title success. Like Chikhura, they play matches in Zestaponi due to the poor state of their own pitch, but they are expected to return home soon.

SHUKURA KOBULETI
A publicly funded team from Adjara in western Georgia, they were promoted to the top flight for the first time in 2014.

TORPEDO KUTAISI
Georgian Cup winners last year, they were returned to municipal ownership by their former owners, petrol company Wissol, but are in the process of becoming independent once more.

Support...fans at Tskhinvali's game against Merani

Derby...Dinamo (in blue) take on Tbilisi rivals Lokomotiv

Liga, which kicked off in March and has success in Europe as its primary aim.

"Before when our clubs were playing in European qualifying it was at the start of our season," explains Jgarkava. "Because most of the players are on one-year contracts, we are not in a good position. Managers don't know their team. Now when we play in Europe we will have settled teams."

The reason for the prevalence of one-year contracts is because so many clubs are municipally funded and public budgets are decided annually.

The exception are Dinamo. "They are run like a mid-sized European club," says Bakar Jordania, the GFF's head of club licensing and monitoring. "The budget of Dinamo is equal to the combined budget of the rest of the league."

In Eastern Europe the notion of taxes paying footballers' wages is not uncommon and until recently 14 of the 16 top-flights club in Georgia were publicly owned. But the GFF now wants a different ownership structure throughout the club game.

The GFF has met with Supporters Direct Europe with a view to encouraging fan ownership of clubs and, in a country where Bayern Munich are one of the most popular teams, Germany is the model for the future.

As of this year, every top-flight club receives 1 million Lari (£330,000) from a state-funded pool. For clubs that put in some of their own money, the state will match funding up to 500,000 Lari (£165,000). Bonuses will bring 7,000 Lari (£2,300) for every point. A similar system will operate in the second tier, but with smaller rewards.

So far the system has been welcomed, with club owners such as Locomotive Tbilisi's Lexo Topuria saying: "I believe other investors will be interested to enter."

And the GFF changes have already encouraged some investment. Dinamo, Lokomotiv and Saburtalo Tbilisi of the 10-team Erovnuli Liga were all in private ownership, while a group of Israeli sports agents recently bought Dila Gori and Torpedo Kutaisi is also set to go private.

In the second tier, which has also been cut to 10 teams, Merani, Gagra and WIT are independent – although sometimes not all is as it seems. While some clubs are described as independent, they can still get as much as 90 per cent of their income from the public purse. And if that were to be removed, the club game would collapse.

Old name... Tskhinvali's team bus, parked outside the Poladi Stadium, still bears their former name

Determined...Georgia stop David Silva of Spain

Charging at the gate would do little to help. Dinamo charge two Lari (about 67p) but have a dwindling fan base, while the early season Tbilisi derby between Lokomotiv and Dinamo at the Meskhi attracted around 500 fans – and that was with free entry.

In the provinces, crowds are better and Merani, who were cup finalists in 2016, attract up to 2,000 people – though they do not charge for fear of alienating fans.

The GFF wants to improve the domestic game's profile and has done a deal to screen matches live on state TV. A fantasy football league has also been launched to restore the link between the public and the grass-roots game.

However, such moves could be a last throw of the dice for football.

If Haig's side gain entry to the Six Nations, rugby could explode in Georgia – and the GFF fears a nation that has produced so many talented players could lose the game altogether. WS

Movers & Shakers

LEVAN KOBIASHVILI
Played in the Bundesliga for Freiburg and Schalke, and won 100 caps for Georgia before retiring in 2014. Was elected GFF president in October 2015.

VLADIMIR WEISS
The Slovakian took Artmedia Bratislava into the Champions League group stage in 2005 and his homeland to their first major finals at the 2010 World Cup, where they beat Italy 3-2 to reach the last 16. Stood down in 2012 and then coached Kairat of Kazakhstan before taking charge of Georgia last year.

MERAB JORDANIA
Controversial former Dinamo Tbilisi player and one-time GFF president who bought Dutch side Vitesse in 2010, allegedly with help from Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich. He left Holland under a cloud of allegations that refuse to disperse and bought Maltese side Valletta in 2014. He recently bought Georgian second-tier side Guria Lanchkhuti.

KAKHA KALADZE
Four times Georgian player of the year, he won the Champions League with Milan. Captain of the national side, he went into politics after retiring in 2012 and is currently vice prime minister and minister for energy.

JABA KANKAVA
Georgia's current captain played in Russia and Ukraine before joining Ligue 1 side Reims in 2015. He was awarded the Ukrainian order of merit after saving the life of Oleh Husyev when the Dynamo Kiev captain's airway was blocked in a collision.

eyewitness

Paul Stafford reports

CRIMEA

Waiting for recognition

Hostilities have left Crimean football in limbo

Empty...the home of TSK Simferopol

"We'd take the money in the form of hamburgers at this point," says Aleksandr Haydash, who is the chairman of TSK Simferopol. He is talking about the €1million promised to the Crimean Football Union by UEFA at a meeting in Switzerland on March 10.

"They have allocated us the money but they don't actually know how to deliver it because of the sanctions on Crimea."

This pretty much sums up the current state of confusion and frustration for football in the troubled peninsula. There is no clear signal of what the future holds for Crimean clubs and no idea when, or if, the money will arrive.

The funding, according to a UEFA spokesman, is "specifically aimed at grass roots and youth-football development". That would mean new pitches and the accreditation of new coaches – something that is badly needed at all levels of the game in Crimea.

"We have 109 youth clubs playing in Crimea right now but no proper pitches," explains Haydash. In Sevastopol, a tour around some of the main facilities reveal torn-up Astroturf and muddy pitches that are so uneven they practically have contour lines. It is the kind of environment in which youth players are more likely to pick up an injury than a contract.

There was a time in recent memory when Crimean clubs such as SC Tavriya Simferopol made brief, yet promising, forays into European competition. Their Champions League and Europa League adventures both ended in heavy defeat, but at least they posed opportunities for the club; opportunities that are no longer available as the Crimean Football Union has not been offered UEFA membership.

In 2014, the existence of all clubs in Crimea was thrown into turmoil by Russia's annexation of the Black Sea peninsula. Each club was forced to liquidate and re-establish itself as a Crimean team rather than a Ukrainian one. SC Tavriya Simferopol split in two, with TSK Simferopol remaining in Crimea while pro-Ukrainians fled to Kherson in southern Ukraine and formed SC Tavriya.

UEFA Executive Committee member Frantisek Laurinec spearheaded the formation of a Crimean Premier League. But without membership of UEFA, its clubs are reduced to playing matches among themselves.

Five of the first eight teams in the inaugural 2015-16 season had never played a professional game before, and before the campaign had ended PFC Berkut were wound up as they didn't even have enough money to keep their website going. If there is a rich and poor when it comes to European club football, Crimea is where the poor clubs now look in order to feel better about themselves.

> "I just hope everything becomes official here and that we'll have the chance to play again against European clubs"
>
> **TSK Simferopol captain Denys Holaydo**

Laurinec was at the UEFA funding meeting in March, and while his intentions were good – and clearly aimed at keeping actual UEFA members Ukraine and Russia pacified – they provided little solace for the Crimean teams caught in the middle.

Now in their second season, TSK Simferopol are fighting to retain their Crimean league title. "There are lots of small countries in Europe that have a great situation with leagues, teams and fans," reasons Haydash. "There's no reason why we can't."

He has just watched his side beat visitors Kafa 3-1 in a stadium that was virtually empty, despite free entry, with free programmes and fine weather. Even the hosts' Ultras cut a depleted and dejected image: 10 young men behind one of the goals, still trying to keep the Ultra dream alive by making plenty of

Local...TSK Simferopol (in white) take on Kafa in the Crimean Premier League

noise and causing a little trouble.

"I like to drink and I like to fight," says Maksim, in his sunglasses and beanie. He wanders down from the stand and stands on the pitch behind the Simferopol goal. Every so often he bounds over to the touchline, yelling encouragement.

"Ronaldinho has played here" Maksim proclaims proudly, before one of his mates comes to the edge of the pitch and promptly corrects him, explaining: "He didn't play, he just sat on the bench."

While their recollections of the glory days differed, both agreed those days were much better than these, boasting "this stadium used to be packed every match", before the groundsman comes over and orders Maksim and his crony away from the side of the pitch and back to the stands.

In his heyday, Haydash was a prolific goalscorer in the Ukrainian and Soviet leagues, and he is now concerned about the health of the game.

"We need that money," he argues. "UEFA want to come and train coaches here, but until the sanctions are lifted this

cannot happen. We are ready for the next stage; we aren't in a position to make our own choices."

This view does not necessarily reflect the view of his players, however, as the general consensus of the fans, squad and backroom staff is that joining the Russian league presents Crimean teams with the best future.

"If we were allowed to play in the Russian league maybe something would improve for us," says Denys Holaydo, TSK Simferopol's captain. "I just hope everything becomes official here and that we'll have the chance to play again against European clubs."

For players like Holaydo, who has four caps for Ukraine's national side – making him perhaps the most-capped player in the Crimean Premier League right now – playing football against big clubs is the main desire. "According to our official football passports, we're still Ukrainian," he adds.

With a return to the Ukrainian league out of the question, the problem for those who look towards Russia is that UEFA might not be too accommodating of the idea. In fact, UEFA's current official line is: "The RFS [Russian Football Union] may not organise any football competition in Crimea, without the consent of UEFA and the Football Federation of Ukraine".

Anton, TSK Simferopol's photographer, theorises that "nothing will happen with Russia until after 2018". He believes that "Russia is already nervous about losing the World Cup so they will not do anything to upset FIFA or UEFA before that".

But it is not a case of wanting to bite the hand that is unable to feed in Crimea. Outside of football, the sanctions have made life increasingly difficult for most people and Russian investment is often the only salvation. If Western governments think that economic sanctions are a way to encourage people to change their minds about who governs them, they have grossly misjudged the situation.

Russia gets to play the benevolent saviour role, and that feeling is not lost on the football scene. "After the bridge is built, everything will be better," says TSK Simferopol midfielder Oleh Humenyuk. And he is not talking in metaphors; he refers to the bridge being built that will connect the Crimean peninsula to the Russian mainland.

Humenyuk, along with Holaydo, is one of Simferopol's most decorated players and no stranger to playing his football in internationally unrecognised territories, having started his career with Sheriff in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria. When pressed about the future he says: "We are not really informed about the plans for the club." Like Holaydo, Humenyuk just wants to leave this limbo and play good football.

So, what it all seems to boil down to is timing. Crimean football may not receive

Win...TSK Simferopol beat Kafa 3-1

Tradition...fan culture around the ground

UEFA funding until the European Union lifts the sanctions and it is anyone's guess when that will happen. With ongoing fighting in the Donbass region of Ukraine, it has to be assumed that it will not be in the immediate future. But is UEFA's carrot-and-stick method of funding enough to stop Crimean clubs looking to Russia for answers?

Once the World Cup in Russia has finished next summer, Crimean teams might opt for a better "domestic" league than the one they currently have, in spite of the potential repercussions. But would Russia actually want to accept the Crimean teams and could they offer funding to develop coaching and youth football in line with what UEFA is offering? These are all questions that remain unresolved as the poorly-attended Crimean Premier League matches grind on.

Meanwhile, in an attempt to remain fair and bipartisan, UEFA are to offer a similar funding package to the Football Federation of Crimea (FFK)...and this is where things get complicated.

The FFK is no longer based in Crimea, having fled to Kherson in Ukraine when Russia assumed power, and they are essentially the overseers of just one team, Tavriya, who now play in Group 2 of the Ukrainian Amateur Football League. The FFK could therefore receive funding, which would be overseen by the Football Federation of Ukraine, but it would go to one displaced Crimean team, while 109 youth teams and eight professional clubs of Crimea must wait.

"We are hostages of this situation," says Haydash, but he remains resolute.

"We're doing our best here with the Premier League, and I'm proud of what we're achieving, despite this situation."

His brow then furrows as he adds: "We just have to wait now for permission from whoever, a collection of different people, I don't know. We wait to have any sense of our future." WS

> "Russia is already nervous about losing the World Cup so they will not do anything to upset FIFA or UEFA before that"
>
> **Anton, TSK Simferopol's photographer**

Atmosphere... Maksim (below) and the ultras try their best (right)

Little man, BIG IMPA

Words:
Nick Bidwell

Standing just 5ft 5in, ***Dries Mertens*** is a flesh-and-blood rebuttal

CT

of the old maxim that size is what matters in football

Thanks to his low centre of gravity, speed, effervescence and ability to bamboozle, 30-year-old Dries Mertens, from the Flemish university town of Leuven always was a small package of concentrated talent. Yet it has only been this season that the Napoli and Belgium attacker has developed into a true world-class performer, spectacularly picking up the gauntlet after his club coach, Maurizio Sarri, converted him from a winger to a false-nine role last autumn.

Without a favourable set of circumstances at Napoli – Polish striker Arkadiusz Milik laid low with a cruciate ligament injury and Italy international Manolo Gabbiadini struggling for form – Mertens, now in his fourth season at the club, probably would have remained Sarri's favourite supersub. But that was the way the cards fell – and what a line-leading audition the diminutive Belgian would give, spellbinding in his prolific marksmanship and artistry.

Napoli's deployment of Mertens at the point of attack has had the effect of plugging into a high-voltage power source. Brilliant in his play between the lines and clever at pulling defenders out of position, he has been on the goal trail with a vengeance. A hat-trick in the 5-0 win at Cagliari in December; four the following week as Torino were seen off 5-3; another triple in February, on this occasion against Bologna; both goals in a 2-1 win at Roma. Factor in a further five goals in the Champions League this term and you have a record even the most established of centre-forwards would be proud of.

During the last month of 2016 alone, his statistics were off the chart. Nine ▸

goals in four matches in 16 days. A goal every 32 minutes. Seventy per cent of his shots on target. Forty-five per cent of his efforts ending up in the back of the net.

After averaging just seven goals a season in his first three campaigns for Napoli, he has already tripled that this term. On selling voracious Argentinian hit man Gonzalo Higuain to Juventus last summer, many Napoli supporters thought the goals might dry up. How wrong they were.

All credit to Sarri for the Mertens makeover. Following Milik's injury, the first thoughts of the Napoli management was to fill the centre-forward hole with an out-of-contract veteran, possibly Miroslav Klose or Emmanuel Adebayor.

Sarri, though, was not keen, opting instead for an in-house solution. Step forward Mertens.

"It doesn't matter if Mertens plays through the middle or on the wing," said Sarri recently. "When someone is in such a great physical and mental state, 10 metres does not make a difference.

"Dries is a very decisive player. He used to make things happen on coming on as a substitute and currently is doing that from the start of a game.

"It's looking like it's the year when it all comes together for him."

The Mertens phenomenon is absolutely impossible to ignore in Italy at the moment. Journalists compare him in reverential tones to such Serie A penalty-box greats as Paolo Rossi and Toto Schillaci. The "Dries Armando Mertens" and "Maramertens" headlines are everywhere in reference to former Napoli icon Diego Armando Maradona. As for the San Paolo faithful, they adore him; in love with both his goals and off-the-cuff trickery.

"In Dries, Napoli supporters have the chance to rediscover a Maradona-like player," Napoli radio journalist Diego De Luca, told Belgian state broadcaster, RTBF. "Someone with South American style, the fantasy and technique. He's tremendously popular. He always makes time for autographs and photos. He and his girlfriend often come into town to eat and they mix well with the locals. Dries has become a Neapolitan."

Progress...at Utrecht

His Napoli goal-fest and resultant confidence boost, also seems to be working wonders for his international career. After mainly being used from the bench at Euro 2016, he is now an automatic choice under *Diables Rouges* coach Roberto Martinez, sparkling in an attacking midfield role, regularly winning Man Of the Match awards and voted Belgium's Player of the Year for 2016.

A "Red Devil' for the last six years, his challenge now is to maintain those high standards. Often forced to play second fiddle to Eden Hazard, his national team career has, in the main, been a stop-start affair. In and out of the side, he has won 24 of his 57 full caps as an impact substitute.

> "Dries is a very decisive player. He used to make things happen as a sub and currently is doing that from the start of a game"
>
> **Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri**

Yet contrary to the received wisdom, Martinez believes he and Hazard can co-exist in the same side and, on the evidence of this season, he would appear to be correct.

Seen through the prism of the past few years, Mertens looks a natural, a footballer born to thrill. But he could quite easily could have ended up in another type of employment. His mother, Marijke, a professor in neurology at a top Flemish university, would have preferred him to take an academic path. Though good enough to feature in the schoolboy and junior ranks of top Belgian club Anderlecht, he was informed at the age of 17 that he was too small and frail to make the pro grade.

Letting such a brilliant talent slip through the net remains a source of much embarrassment for Anderlecht, and the blame game continues to be played to this day. Werner Deraeve, at that time the club's academy chief, insists that the decision was made by then first-team coach Hugo Broos. The latter begs to differ, pointing the finger at Deraeve.

"Werner Deraeve was responsible for the Anderlecht soccer school and he's passing the buck," retorted Broos in an article in the French magazine *So Foot*. "Back then, I hadn't even heard of Dries Mertens. I had some contacts with the under-19s, but not younger age groups.

"That was the way it worked at Anderlecht. It was them [the academy management] who decided to allow Dries to go. Not me."

Dries' Plan B was to become a PE teacher like his father Herman, and for a while he studied Physical Education at a sports college in Gent. Football, however, was never really off the agenda and soon he would be back in the soccer saddle, catching the eye of high-school teacher cum Gent youth-team coach Etienne De Wispelaere and promptly joining the local side.

"I'd never seen anyone with such technique, game awareness and powers of acceleration," De Wispelaere told Belgian daily *Le Soir* in 2014. "Nor have I seen anyone as good as him since.

"As soon as I saw him in action, I got in touch with Michel Louwagie [then Gent general manager] and said I'd found a future Belgian player of the Year award. He asked me to bring him along and the transfer was completed. For zero cost."

With De Wispelaere in the mentor role, Mertens featured as number 10 for the Gent under-17s and reserves. And when, in early 2006, the former was appointed head coach of third division Eendracht Aalst, one of his first acts was to bring in the 18-year-old Dries on a loan.

It was a six-month spell with a

Fan...Belgium boss Roberto Martinez

Timeline

AUG 1, 2009
Makes his Utrecht debut in a 1-0 win at RKC Waalwijk.

AUG 16, 2009
Scores his first goals for Utrecht with a brace in a 2-2 draw at home with VVV-Venlo.

JUL 15, 2010
Makes his European club debut and scores the fourth goal as Utrecht beat KF Tirana 4-0 in the Europa League.

FEB 9, 2011
Makes his international debut as a sub in Belgium's 1-1 friendly draw with Finland.

MAY 15, 2011
Scores a hat-trick in his last game for Utrecht as they beat AZ 5-1 on the last day of the season.

AUG 7, 2011
Scores on his debut for PSV in a 3-1 defeat at AZ on the opening day of the season.

AUG 28, 2011
Scores his first hat-trick for PSV in a 6-1 win at home to Excelsior.

bitter-sweet finale as Mertens was voted Eendracht's player of the year but with the club being relegated.

"I asked Dries to accompany me to Eendracht because this was his chance to play first-team football and I thought it would be a great platform for him," remembers De Wispelaere. "I believed in him and, at that time, probably was the only one. Neither he nor I would regret it.

"He settled in straight away. When he turned up at Aalst, we had to give him a schoolboy-size tracksuit. But I never heard anybody laugh at him. We appreciated him too much for that.

"I didn't teach him to play. He learnt all on his own. He was a very intelligent young man. I knew his father and I was sure that he would develop a similar physique to his dad. Not tall but pretty muscular. I thought he just needed time."

Despite his promising work at Eendracht, the Gent powers-that-be remained unsure about him and were happy to farm him out once more, this time to Dutch second tier side, Apeldoorn. Although AGOVV, as the club are commonly known, have never competed in the Dutch elite, for Mertens

Loan...during his time at AGOVV

it was the most perfect of postings. It was a move only with benefits: the first pro contract of his life, a feeling that he was wanted and team-mates such as future Belgium international Nacer Chadli, who is now at West Bromwich Albion.

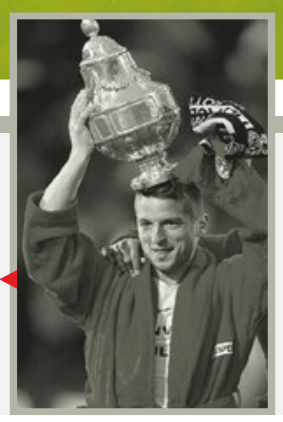
"The original deal with Apeldoorn was for him to have a two-week trial," recalls Herman Mertens. "But on his first night there, he rang to tell me that he had signed on. His first training session had convinced them. He felt right about the move almost instantly. "

In the summer of 2007, at the end of the young attacking midfielder's inaugural

Big stage... representing his country at Euro 2016

SEP 24, 2011
Scores four goals in a 7-1 league defeat of Roda JC, taking his tally to 11 in his first seven games for PSV.

APR 8, 2012
Gets the second goal as PSV beat Heracles 3-0 in the Dutch Cup Final, in Rotterdam.

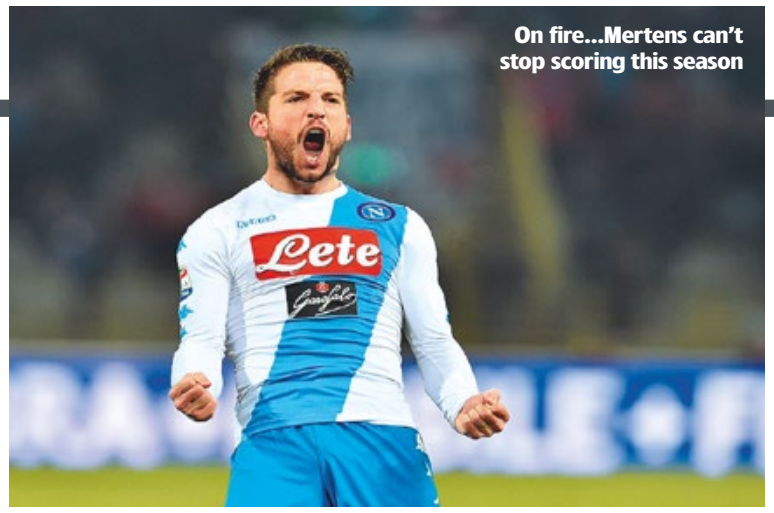


AUG 15, 2012
Scores his first international goal as Belgium beat neighbours Holland 4-2 in a friendly in Brussels.

MAY 9, 2013
Defeat to AZ in the Dutch Cup Final means he leaves PSV with two runners-up medals, as they finish second to Ajax in the league.

AUG 25, 2013
The first signing of new Napoli coach Rafa Benitez, he makes his debut in a 3-0 win over Bologna on the first day of the season.

OCT 30, 2013
Scores his first goal for Napoli with the winner in a 2-1 win away to Fiorentina.


On fire...Mertens can't stop scoring this season

season with *De Blauwen*, he had no hesitation accepting a permanent deal. For the next two seasons under Dutch coach John Van den Brom, he would go from strength to strength, piling up the goals and assists, becoming club captain and being voted the best player in the league. Now his career was going places.

"John van den Brom was the most important coach in my career," declared Mertens in a 2012 interview with Belgian newspaper *La Derniere Heure*. "He did so much for me. Look at the stats.

"In my first season at AGOVV, before John came, I scored two or three goals, The second, with John, I was up to 14 or 15. He's a coach who improves players. That's what he focuses on, as well as a spectacular attacking game with lots of combination play and control. I couldn't ever say anything negative about him. I'm still in touch with him. He's now a friend."

After three seasons of substantial progress at AGOVV, the hour had now struck for an upgrade in class and in June 2009, he opted for the obvious internal switch, a €700,000 transfer to Utrecht of the Eredivisie. Usually lining up on the left flank, he proved to be a thorn in the flesh of virtually any opponent who crossed his path. Too quick to catch, too slippery to neutralise. Equally too deadly a marksman, especially when curling home free-kicks.

> "I'd never seen anyone with such technique, game awareness and powers of acceleration"
> **Gent youth-team coach Etienne De Wispelaere**

With 10 goals and 17 assists in his final season at the Stadion Galgenwaard, he was undeniably in the masterclass zone and was rightly voted runner-up to Luis Suarez of Ajax in the league player of the year poll. As modest as ever at the awards ceremony, he chose to dedicate it to Van den Brom.

That was also his breakthrough season on the full international front, earning a non-playing call-up for the Euro 2012 qualifiers against Kazakhstan and Austria. He then made his international bow in a friendly with Finland in February 2011 – a game appropriately held on his old stomping ground in Gent.

Ironically, the coach who handed him his first full cap was Georges Leekens, who in a previous life as Gent boss had studiously ignored the first-team claims of a teenage Mertens. Some five years later, Leekens would have the chance to make amends.

"Little Dries has become big," he declared on welcoming the youngster on board in the autumn of 2010.

Much to Utrecht's displeasure, Leekens publicly encouraged Dries to leave for a bigger stage and by the summer of 2011, our hero was ready to act on the advice. Anderlecht, the club who rejected him as a teenager, momentarily were in pole position to sign him, only to be deterred by his high price tag. Ajax and a number of Spanish and English clubs were also in the hunt, but he finally would opt for an €8.5m move to PSV, where he enjoyed two wonderful seasons of left-wing productivity, notably netting in their 2012 Dutch Cup Final victory over Heracles, amassing 43 goals in all competitions and creating another 43.

It was quite an achievement for a player who, while at Apeldoorn, was sneeringly described as a "garden gnome" by NEC's chief scout Henk Grim.

One of his qualities which is rarely mentioned is his persistence and since quitting Holland for Napoli in a €9.5m deal in June 2013, he has certainly had his share of difficult moments. While his first coach at the San Paolo, Rafa Benitez, was a huge admirer, the former Liverpool boss mainly saw him as a de luxe substitute, someone to throw into the fray as defenders tired. And when Benitez left in 2015, his successor, Sarri, initially stuck to the same recipe.

Players with less belief would have given up the ghost. However, Mertens was determined to stay the course, invariably delivering as a supersub, learning to work harder off the ball and clearly feeding off the love of the Napoli crowd. The reward for his resilience and positive attitude was the metamorphosis this season into a top-calibre central goalgetter.

Patience and perseverance are very much Martens' watch words. Whether in the early stages of his club career at Napoli or with Belgium, whenever the tide has turned against him he has knuckled down and pushed on.

Staying calm and carrying on. It's a formula that works.

For all his ability, Mertens never was the precocious boy wonder, the overnight sensation. Initially held back by doubts about his diminutive stature, he always was a degree behind the curve.

A relatively advanced 22 on his Eredivisie debut for Utrecht; approaching 24 when making his national-team bow and first appearing in the Champions League at the ripe old age of 26, against Borussia Dortmund in 2013. Sometimes, good things take time.

It's been a career path built on common sense and incremental advancement, slowly but surely ascending the Benelux football hierarchy, then moving to the more challenging Italian scene, climbing the ladder one rung at a time.

No shortcuts, no rush, no lack of success. **WS**

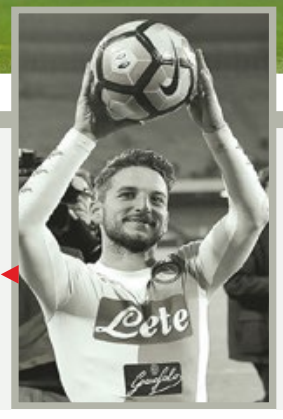
Success...he had two great seasons at PSV

MAY 3, 2014
Scores Napoli's third in their 3-1 win in the Italian Cup Final against Fiorentina after appearing as a second-half sub.

JUN 7, 2014
Makes his World Cup debut and appears as a sub to score the winning goal as Belgium beat Algeria 2-1.

APR 19, 2016
Scores a 30-minute hat-trick in the second half of Napoli's 6-0 win at home to Bologna.

DEC 18, 2016
Scores four times in a 5-3 win at home against Torino, having scored a hat-trick the previous week away to Cagliari.



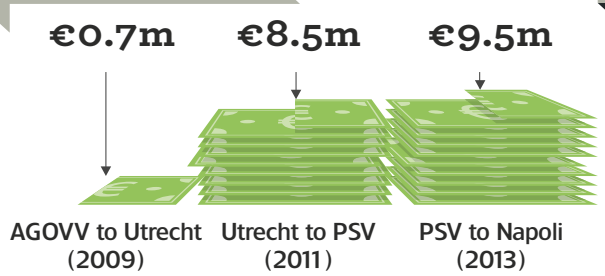
DEC 30, 2016
Is named Belgium's Player of the Year, beating Eden Hazard and Radja Nainggolan to the award.

FEB 4, 2017
Scores a hat-trick in Napoli's 7-1 win at Bologna – the first time the club have ever scored seven goals in an away league game.

Dries Mertens

the numbers game

TRANSFER FEES



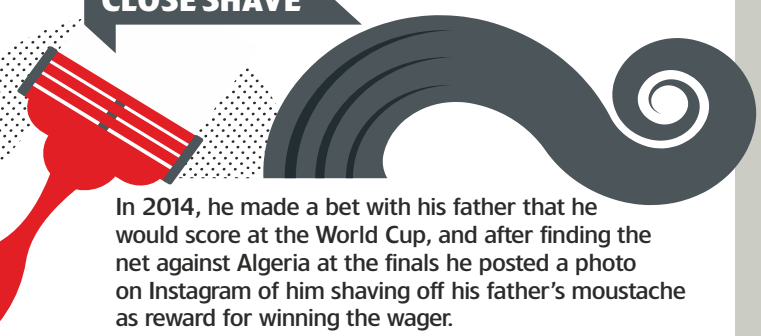
BELGIUM

57 CAPS

11 GOALS

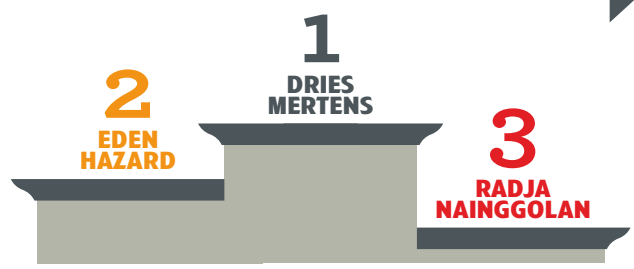
SERIE A TOP SCORERS 2016-17

CLOSE SHAVE



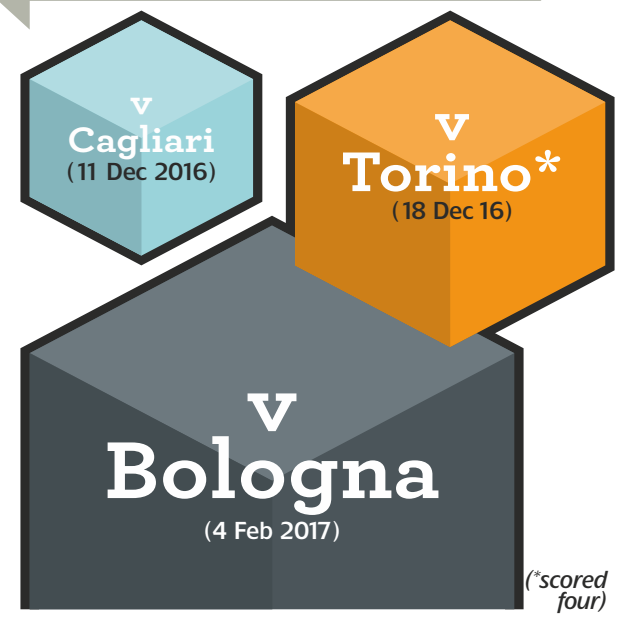
In 2014, he made a bet with his father that he would score at the World Cup, and after finding the net against Algeria at the finals he posted a photo on Instagram of him shaving off his father's moustache as reward for winning the wager.

BELGIUM'S BEST PLAYER 2016



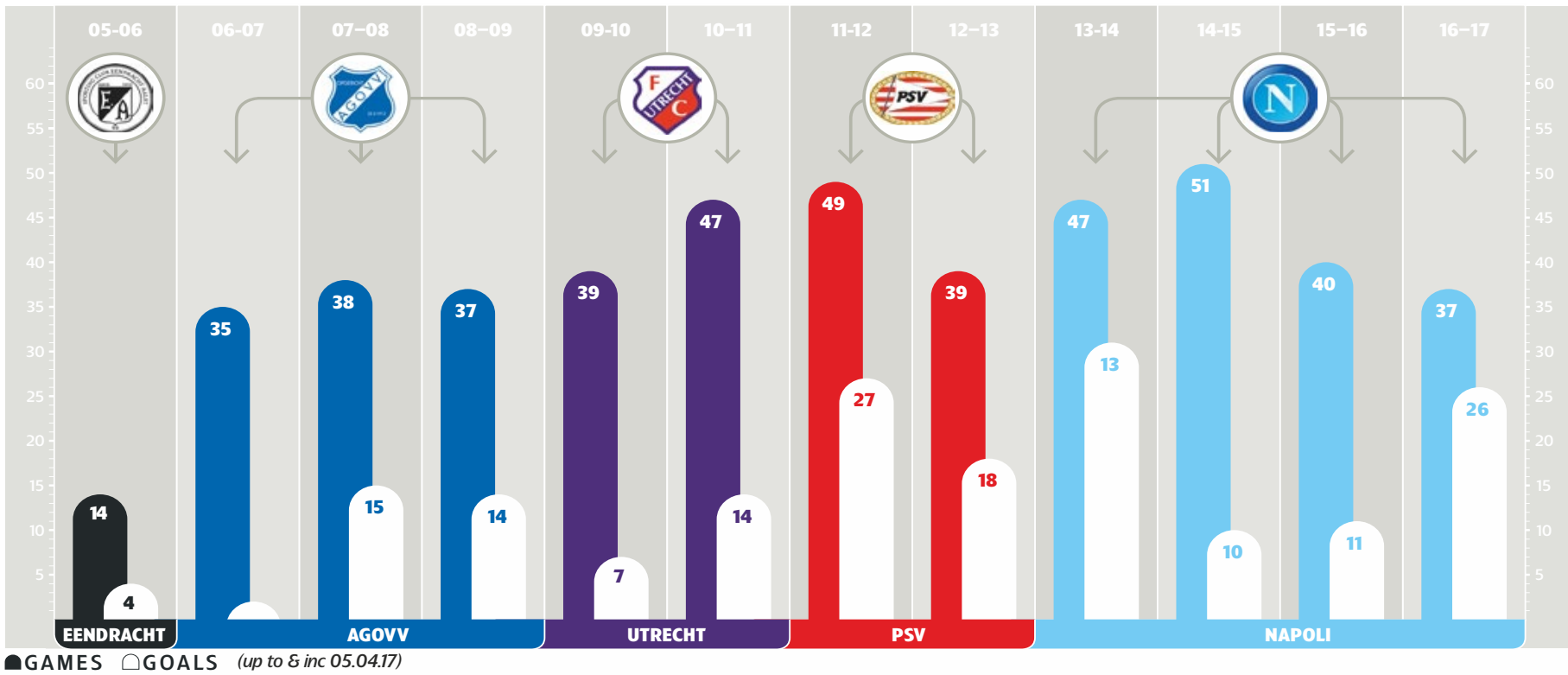
(as voted for by fans of the national team)

MERTENS' HAT-TRICKS 2016-17



*(*scored four)*

HONOURS



6 of the best out of contract

Nick Bidwell profiles half a dozen players who will be available on free transfers this summer

1 Yevhen KHACHERIDI

DYNAMO KIEV & UKRAINE

The CV of the towering Dynamo and Ukraine central defender comes stacked with achievements: 45 caps for his country, two European Championships (2012 and 2016), over 250 competitive club games and 33 Champions League starts. However, the 29-year-old's one major weakness is a tendency for ill-discipline and allowing his total commitment to the cause to spill over into a one-man crime wave. A case in point was his needless expulsion in the second leg of a World Cup 2014 play-off against France. The son of an ethnic Greek father and Ukrainian mother, he was linked with a move to Everton last year and is currently rumoured to be a target for Turkish outfit Galatasaray. Has been on the Dynamo pay roll since 2008, when he joined them from Volyn Lutsk.

2 Christian NOBOA

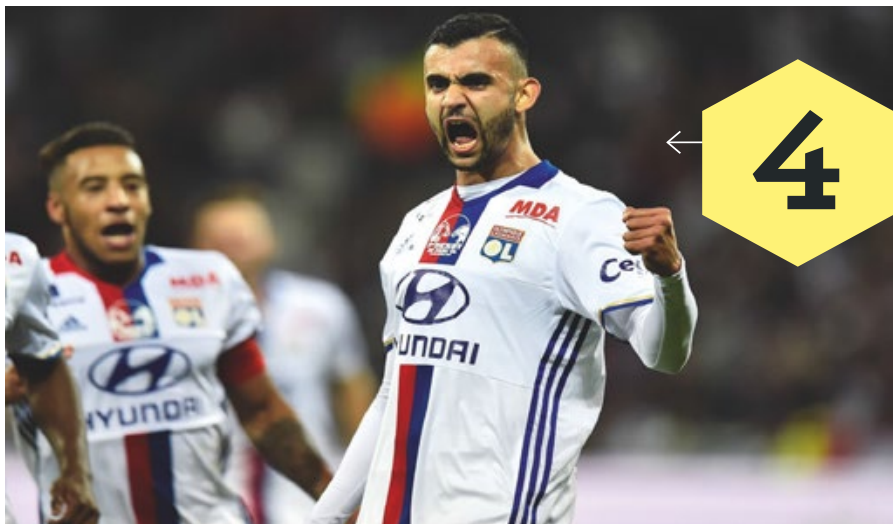
ROSTOV (RUS) & ECUADOR

One of the most important elements in Rostov's shock transformation last season from relegation candidates to Russian Premier League runners-up, the 31-year-old schemer is the man for all seasons. One moment, dynamic or letting fly from distance; the next, displaying his trademark deftness of touch and precision passing. All told, he has starred in Russia for a decade – with Rostov, Rubin Kazan and Dynamo Moscow – and is undoubtedly one of the finest imports in that country's football history. Having begun his career with leading Ecuadorian outfit Emelec, he boasts 75 full caps and has taken part in three Copa Americas and the 2014 World Cup finals. His most likely destination is Spain, where Valencia, Espanyol and Celta Vigo are all thought to be interested.

3 Marcel HELLER

DARMSTADT & GERMANY

Barring a miracle, two things will happen at Darmstadt at the end of this season: relegation from the Bundesliga and the departure of their right-wing flyer. Among the quickest players in the league, the 31-year-old unsuccessfully tried to engineer a transfer last summer and is now in a position to make it happen, with a string of leading German clubs plotting in the shadows to sign him. Technically strong and an outstanding counter-attacker he will be sorely missed at the Bollenfalltor stadium, having been a symbol of Darmstadt's three-season journey from the depths of the German third tier to the national elite. A Germany under-21 cap, he joined Darmstadt in 2013 and local punk band Decubitus wrote a song called *Heller ist Schneller* (Heller is quicker) about him.



4 Rachid GHEZZAL

LYON (FRA) & ALGERIA

According to the rumour mill, the winger has agreed in principle to a move to Monaco in the summer. He caught the eye last season with his explosive qualities, but has not quite hit the same heights this term, clearly distracted by all the transfer talk and his deteriorating relationship with Lyon club president Jean-Michel Aulas, who was so annoyed he revealed the nuts and bolts of the new contract offer: a four-year deal worth €280,000 a month. He played four times for the French under-20s, only to later opt for Algeria, where his elder brother, Abdelkader, is also a full international.

5 Gonzalo RODRIGUEZ

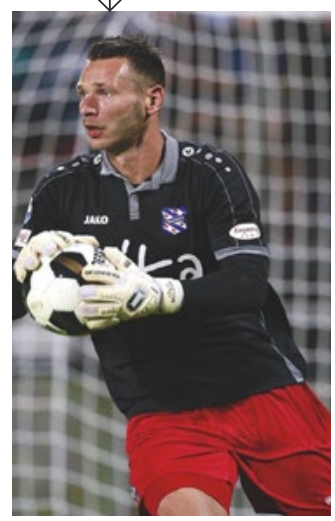
FIORENTINA (ITA) & ARGENTINA

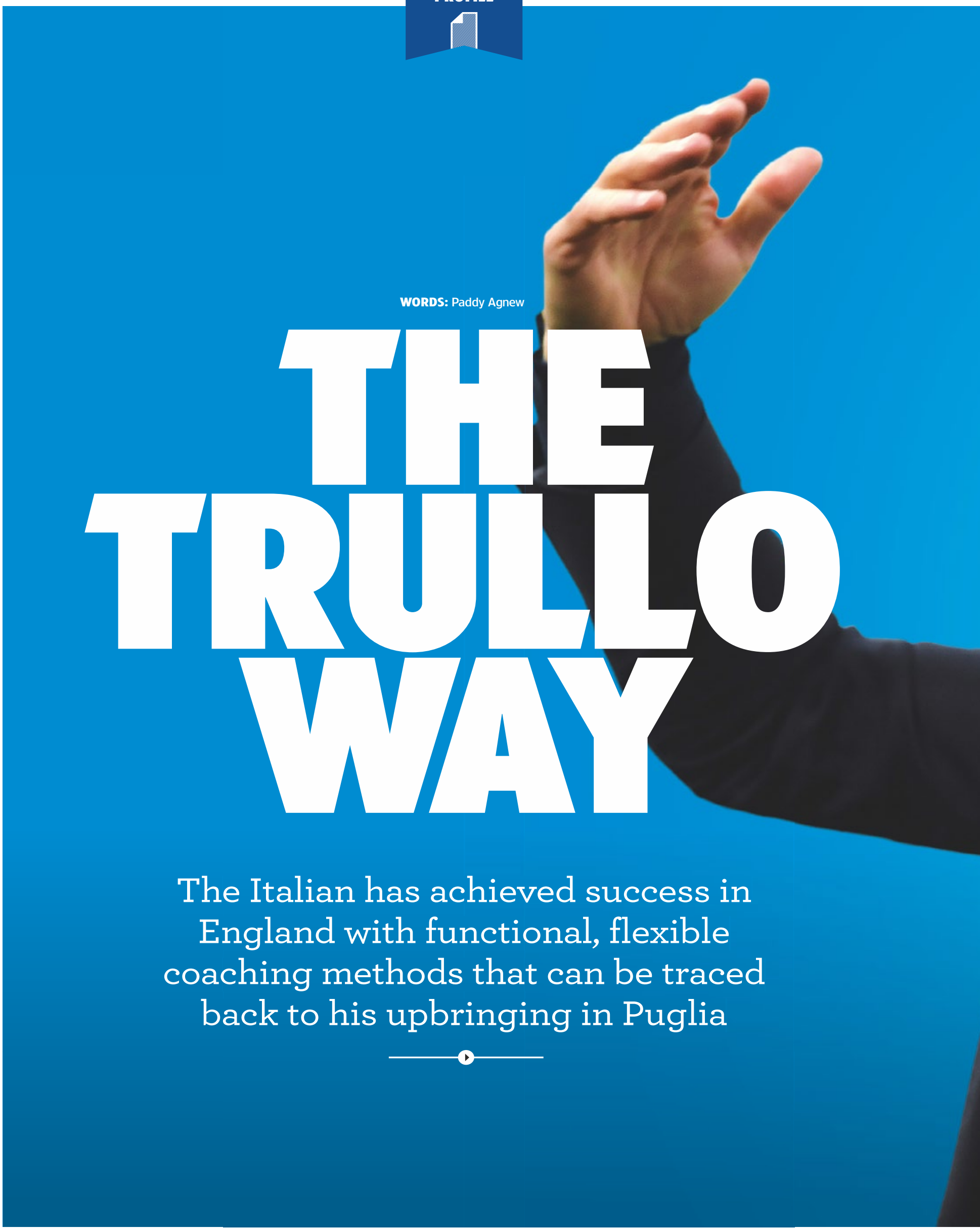
Unhappy that the contract-renewal proposal put to him involved a €1m pay cut, the 32-year-old Fiorentina skipper and centre-back is on the verge of becoming a free agent, with a number of Serie A clubs – Lazio, Internazionale and Milan among them – hoping to take advantage. However, another option could be a return to his home city of Buenos Aires to play for San Lorenzo. Only last year he talked about ending his career with his first professional club and the pull of the heartstrings may be a decisive factor. Whoever signs him will be availing themselves of a two-for-the-price-of-one deal. On the one hand, a combative, teak-tough stopper with a flair for scoring goals; on the other, a player of considerable top-level pedigree, someone who spent seven seasons in Spain with Villarreal and five campaigns with the *Viola*. He has enjoyed far fewer opportunities with the Argentinian national team, winning just seven caps.

6 Erwin MULDER

HEERENVEEN & HOLLAND

Former Feyenoord and Holland under-20 keeper who is looking for a fresh challenge in England or the Bundesliga. Goalkeepers usually are at their peak in their 30s and, just turned 28, he still has plenty of top-flight life left in him. Nurtured at the Vitesse academy, he has an excellent all-round game. An agile and acrobatic shot stopper, he is very tidy with the ball at his feet and is an influential leader. During his time at Feyenoord, he was sent off in a Europa League tie versus Roma while not on the pitch, earning his marching orders for an aggressive gesture towards an assistant referee. He was included in the provisional Dutch squad for Euro 2012 but did not make the final cut.





WORDS: Paddy Agnew

THE TRULLO WAY

The Italian has achieved success in England with functional, flexible coaching methods that can be traced back to his upbringing in Puglia

FIFA councillor Evelina Christillin, one of the main organisers of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin and a passionate Juventus supporter, well remembers the July 2014 evening when Antonio Conte launched a bombshell by announcing his resignation as Juve coach.

Just two months earlier, Conte had guided the side to a third consecutive Serie A title, thus completing their rehabilitation at the top table of European football in the wake of the infamous 2006 *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal. In a *Huffington Post* article, Christillin recalled: "I was at a very serious meeting with bankers, in which we were discussing the Basle 3 agreement – the European Central Bank's Asset Quality review requirements of Italian and other banks and matters of that sort.

"All of a sudden, someone shattered the lugubrious solemnity by shouting out 'Conte Has Resigned'. All of a sudden, magically, financial issues were off the table. Instead, the meeting gave way to a perfect storm of phone calls, text messages, web searches and calls to reporters who might know something.

"In reality, this was the night when Conte beat [Central Bank governor Mario] Draghi 7-1, just like the astonishing Germany v Brazil World Cup game of a few days earlier."

The shock was serious. Conte was nothing less than the prophet who had led Juventus out of the wilderness. And straight across the Red Sea too. How could he and the club part their ways?

Well, they could, and they did. And Chelsea would do well to remember this.

The break-up with Juventus, by and large, came about because Conte began to get "perceptions and sensations" that not everyone in Turin was on the same page when it came to planning for the new season. In particular, the Juventus ownership – in the person of Fiat Chrysler Automobiles president, John Elkann – seemed distinctly luke warm about major transfer-market spending.

Conte is a unique, outrageously talented football animal. If you want to understand him, you should probably consider the Trullo...

The Trullo is a unique, dry-stone hut with a conical roof, intended essentially for agricultural labourers and found only in Conte's native Puglia in south-east Italy, on the very heel of the Italian peninsula. The thing about the Trullo is that it is sparse and basic, functional and flexible. The town of Alberobello, which contains a whole village of Trulli is now a UNESCO World Heritage centre.

Conte might not be a "world heritage" yet, but his sustained football success means he is heading that way.

Not many would have predicted such a success story for Conte the coach. As a player, for Marcello Lippi with both Juventus and Italy, he was by no means the most talented midfielder of his generation. But what he lacked in technical talent he more than made up for with an unrelenting competitive hard edge. He was always one of those players who "made a difference", to whom Juve often looked when the going got tough.

As a coach, Conte seems to bring exactly the same terrifying determination to the job. The manner in which he transformed a Juventus team that had just finished seventh in consecutive seasons into an all-conquering machine, capable of immediately lifting three successive Serie A titles, remains an outstanding example of inspirational and technically brilliant coaching.

Current Sky Italia pundit Giancarlo Marocchi, who played alongside him at Juventus from 1991 to 1996, admits that Conte's success as a coach took him by

Celebratory...after his Juventus side beat Roma in May 2014

Scorer...on target against Rangers in 1995

In charge...ahead of a penalty shoot-out at Euro 2016

surprise, explaining: "I would never have predicted that he would become such a good manager/coach.

"Yes, he was a great player, he was the captain of Juventus, but he was not particularly disciplined tactically, he used to play *a tuttocampo* (all over the pitch). He wasn't one of the those midfielders who played in front of his defence and who would read the situation.

"He wasn't born a coach but he became one thanks to the way he played, thanks to the difficulties he had on the field. Even though he was one of those players who made the difference, inspired his team and often scored goals, he was not hugely gifted technically.

"As a player, he would often find himself in a tight corner and he would have to dig himself out, and I think that one of his great strengths as a coach is to create a game plan that always leaves his players with plenty of options which will compensate for any shortcomings in technique, that's a situation he himself was familiar with."

And Marocchi is not surprised by Conte's motivational powers, saying: "As a player, he was like that too, he was an intense, inspirational force, he always gave everything."

Curiously, Marocchi also believes that Conte has one important advantage over many of his ultra-exclusive peer group, men such as Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti and Roberto Mancini.

"He is a terrific fitness coach" reveals Marocchi. "He does not leave that to his staff, he does that himself because he has a great understanding of what individual players do or do not need to do in training, he's studied athletic preparation. And you need to remember that his training can be very intense but he decides everything, in terms of both quantity and quality.

"On top of that, it has surprised me that he has become such a good coach from the tactical viewpoint. I would never have had doubts about his commitment, his determination, his desire to get to the very top but tactically, he is much, much better as a coach than he was as a player."

> "He is a man of the pitch, a guy who just loves to be out there every day training"
>
> **Marcello Lippi**

Looking at his old team-mate, Marocchi says that there must now be only a "50-50" chance that he will stay at Chelsea. He reckons that the "Trullo" might just decide that one fabulous, title-winning season represents the perfect moment to end his Premier League experience.

While that remains to be seen, Marocchi makes an intriguing observation about the impact of having played in an excellent Lippi-coached Juventus, pointing out: "I have forgotten many of the games we played together, but I remember the 1996 Champions League Final when we beat Ajax on penalties in Rome.

"You should look at that team sheet again. We started that game with a midfield made up of Paulo Sousa, Didier

Trullo...the basic dry-stone hut unique to Conte's native Puglia

Deschamps and Antonio Conte, and the curious thing is that all three have turned out to be excellent coaches.

"There were other guys in that team who became coaches, Pietro Vierchowod and Ciro Ferrara for example, but those three in midfield were something else. Look at them now, Conte at Chelsea, Deschamps with France and Sousa at Fiorentina, all of them doing a good job."

If there is a concept to which Italian football folk often refer when discussing Conte the coach, it is a reference to his eat-sleep-drink, manic obsession with his work.

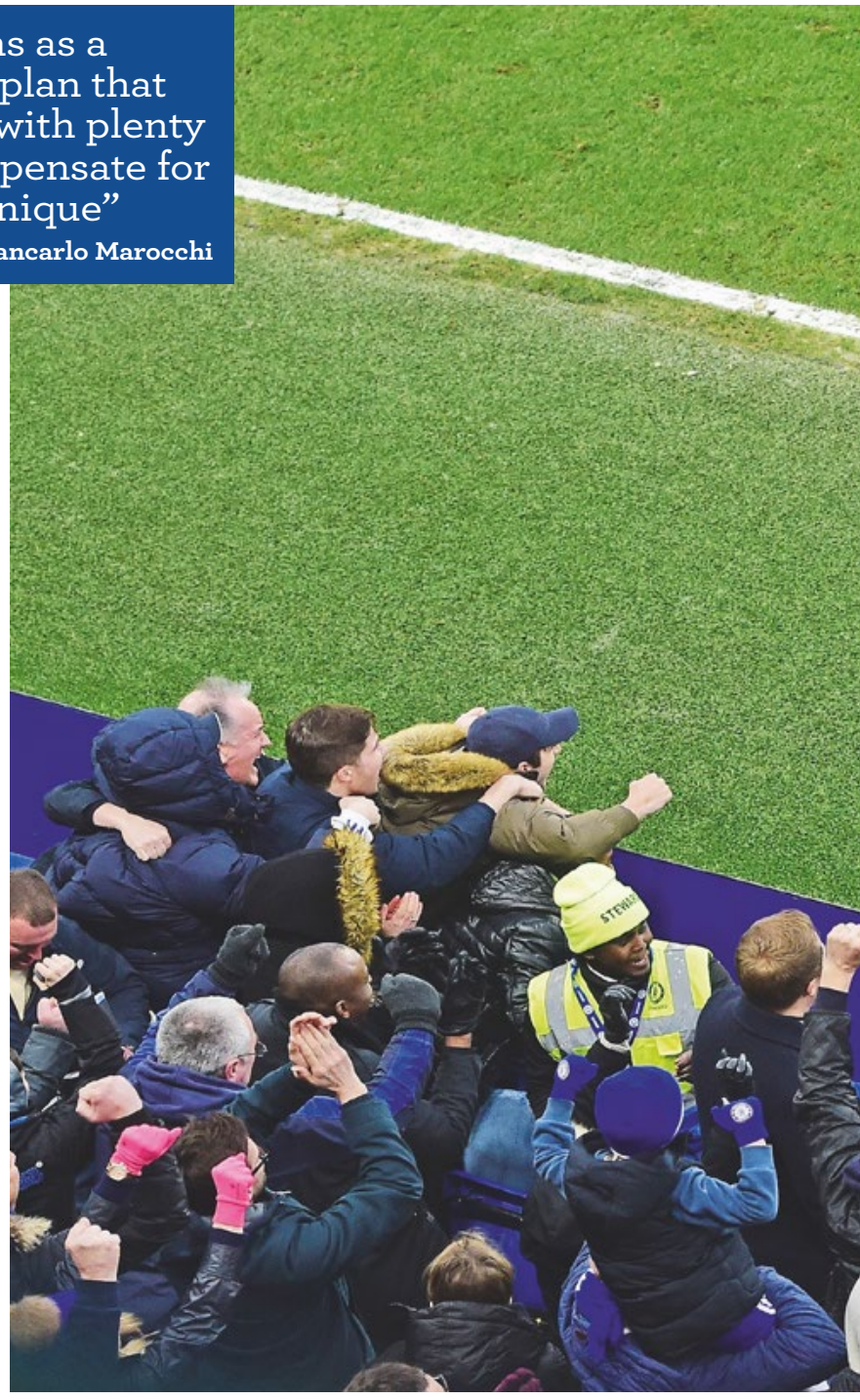
"When he announced before last summer's Euro 2016 finals that, win or lose, he would be leaving the Italy job, his former boss Lippi commented: "Antonio is just acknowledging that he is still too young to be coaching a national team. He is a man of the pitch, a guy who just loves to be out there every day training."

> "One of his great strengths as a coach is to create a game plan that always leaves his players with plenty of options which will compensate for any shortcomings in technique"
>
> **Sky Italia pundit Giancarlo Marocchi**

This is something Conte himself had indicated on the day that he announced his post-tournament resignation, saying: "When, after the Euro qualifiers were over, I realised that it would be four months before I coached the team again, I understood then that I did not want to spend another two years like this, shut-up in the garage half the time."

That news conference inevitably prompted speculation about a future with Chelsea rather than his likely squad for

Training...going in practice games with the first-team squad at Chelsea

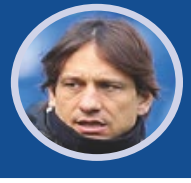


CONTE'S INNER CIRCLE

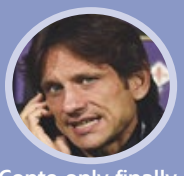
While there are some very important "assistants" in Conte's professional life, those who know him well are very aware that he is a coach who decides everything for himself. The Chelsea boss knows exactly what he wants and where he is going.

However, there is a close-knit group of people who have been around Conte, if not throughout his entire coaching career, certainly in the past five or six years...

ANGELO ALESSIO
A former Juventus team-mate, the 51-year-old has been Conte's number two since 2010, following him from Siena to Juventus to Italy and most recently to Chelsea. A useful if not spectacular midfielder as a player, his calm demeanour serves as a perfect antidote to his more fiery boss. However, when it comes to football matters, there is probably no one more trusted by Conte.



GIANLUCA CONTE
Gianluca worked with his older brother at Bari, Juventus and Italy, fulfilling various roles, including that of observer of forthcoming opponents.



DANIELE CONTE
Acts as his brother's agent in negotiation and, along with sibling Gianluca, he ensures an important family presence in the coach's professional life. Conte only finally agreed to take the Italy job in 2014 when he realised that his father, Cosimo, felt it was a great honour and was moved by the idea of his son leading the *Azzurri*.

GIANLUCA SPINELLI
Formerly with Serie A side Genoa, the goalkeeping coach first worked with Conte during his time as Italy's national coach. He impressed his boss sufficiently to be offered the chance to follow him to England and work with Chelsea.

PAOLO BERTELLI
The 55-year-old was fitness coach at Fiorentina, Venezia, Udinese and Roma before becoming a vital cog in the Conte team, having followed him from Juventus to the Italy national team and then on to Chelsea.

Passion...enjoying a goal with Chelsea fans

Determined...getting involved against Swansea

Pressure...going to a court of appeal over match-fixing claims

France. Despite that, Euro 2016 deserves to be recalled as another Conte success story, notwithstanding a less than ideal build-up. After all, not only was there his pre-tournament resignation, there was also the question of his involvement in the infamous, Cremona-based "Last Bet" match-fixing trial.

Conte had been charged with not reporting a last-day of the season Serie B relegation/promotion "fix" between Albinoleffe, who won 1-0, and his side Siena in 2011.

Although Conte repeatedly declared himself innocent of any wrongdoing, and his lawyers secured him a fast-track hearing, this did not constitute an ideal, preparation for Euro 2016. Despite that, Conte pulled off a minor miracle with an arguably below-par Italy squad, going out on penalties to Germany in the quarter-finals. Perhaps one day, further down the road, he will get a second crack at the national job.

Conte the Trullo, Conte the expression of a pugliese culture, during his Italian glory days was sometimes called the "Italian Mourinho", essentially because with him as with the Special One his press conferences could be "lively".

When former Juventus coach Fabio Capello expressed some criticisms of Conte's Juve, he observed: "All that I recall about Capello's Juventus was some very dull football and how they were stripped of two titles [by the *Calciopoli* investigation]."

Asked about an alleged penalty not awarded to Lazio during a 1-1 draw in Rome, Conte looked at his interlocutor and said: "I am counting here [to 10]..." But the countdown failed to achieve its purpose because after a short pause, Conte observed: "You should concentrate on being a journalist not a fan."

Chelsea supporters might do well to recall another aspect of the Conte mindset. In a football world where, for many, three years is the normal time cycle on the bench of a big club, Conte has never made any secret of his desire to keep on moving, not to link his name to any one club in the manner of an Arsene Wenger at Arsenal.

Two years ago, Mirko Graziani of *La Gazzetta dello Sport* highlighted these press-conference words from Conte: "If one day in the future, I was to coach Inter, I would be their number one fan, let everyone be clear about that."

Two years later, Conte's name continues to be linked with the Chinese/Indonesian owned Inter. Who knows, in another year's time, that could be the next stop for the Trullo. **WS**

Learning...during his playing days with Juve

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

CLASS OF '97

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Lucas TOUSART

Age 19 (29.04.97), Lyon & France

In a sentence
Only on the Lyon fringes last summer and within a whisker of being loaned out, the defensive midfielder has made great strides since, earning a first-team place and attracting covetous glances from leading European outfits such as Bayern Munich, Manchester City and Manchester United.

What they say
David Le Frapper, his former coach at Valenciennes: "Although he knows what he's doing technically, he isn't a number 10. He's well aware where his strengths lie. He's a little Didier Deschamps."
Ludovic Batelli, coach of France under-19s: "As our captain, he represents a double guarantee. In competition he is our cornerstone and is equally influential in the way we operate as a group off the pitch. He's solid. Solid mentally, solid in his play."
Former France youth coach Patrick Gonfalone: "He's the type of player who complements others, who brings added value to the team. He's not one for complacency. He's very lucid when analysing what he has to do to improve."

> "He's the type of player who complements others"
> **Patrick Gonfalone**

The story so far
Brought up in the Aveyron region of south-west France, he was a striker in his early years but was turned down by Toulouse and Lille. He was switched to the role of a midfield ball-winner while in the youth ranks of local club Rodez and joined second-division side Valenciennes in 2013. Soon after making his senior debut, in January 2015, he broke into the French under-19 squad and the following summer he joined Lyon for €2.5million. Captained the French side that won last summer's European Under-19 Championship and has regularly featured as one of the double pivots in Lyon's 4-2-3-1 set-up.

The next step
Lyon will be hoping to keep him on board for at least another couple of years. With three seasons left on the teenager's current contract, negotiations on a lucrative extension are underway.

Strengths
Displays tactical discipline, bite in the tackle, aerial power, a remarkable ability to fill gaps. Athletic and aggressive, he will run all day.

Weaknesses
His link-up play needs a little more polish, while a touch more imagination in his distribution would do him the world of good.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT TOUSART

- Growing up he also excelled at cross country and tennis.
- During the August 2016 transfer window, Palermo had a €5m offer rejected, while Stoke City and West Ham United were also thought to be interested.
- Has a particular fondness for the English Premier League and is a fan of Brazil's David Luiz, whom he prefers as a midfield enforcer.

David NERES

Age 20 (03.03.97), Ajax (Hol) & Brazil
The right-winger was recently lured to Amsterdam from Sao Paulo in a €12m move that saw him become the Eredivisie's most expensive overseas signing of all time and the third-biggest sale in the Brazilian club's history.

Alex GERSBACH

Age 19 (08.05.97), Rosenborg (Nor) & Australia
The left-back swapped Sydney for the Norwegian top-flight early last year and reaped immediate rewards with a league-and-cup double. Made his Australia debut as a sub against Greece last summer.

MALCOLM

Age 20 (26.02.97), Bordeaux (Fra) & Brazil
Bought for €5m from Corinthians in January 2016, the winger has not been one of those imports who struggle to acclimatise to a new land and a new way of life.

Ludovic BLAS

Age 19 (31.12.97), Guingamp & France
Attacking midfielder who played a key role in France's triumph at the 2016 Euro Under-19s. Left-footed, he usually lines up on the right and is a box of tricks.

ZHANG Yuning

Age 20 (05.01.97) Vitesse (Hol) & China
One of Chinese football's most exciting prospects, the powerful striker joined Vitesse from Hangzhou Greentown in July 2015.

Henry ONYEKURU

Age 19 (05.06.97), Eupen (Blg) & Nigeria
Striker or winger whose numerous goals and assists for Eupen mean he looks certain to leave in the summer – for France, Germany, England or Spain.

Enes UNAL

Age 19 (10.05.97), Twente (Hol, on loan from Manchester City, Eng) & Turkey
Centre-forward who is a beguiling blend of physicality and finesse. A prodigious scorer with Bursaspor reserves, he has been on City's books since the summer of 2015.

Mikel OYARZABAL

Age 19 (21.04.97), Real Sociedad & Spain
Left-winger who signed a six-year contract last year with a €60m release clause. Made his full international debut in a friendly against Bosnia last summer.

GIGI BECALI

"I am a born warrior. I will never retire from Steaua"

The Romanian club's controversial owner talks about God, prison and women's football

Where do you start when trying to explain who Gigi Becali is? The owner of Romania's most-successful side, Steaua Bucharest, he is loved and loathed in equal measure in his homeland.

The former shepherd made his fortune in real estate after the fall of communism before buying Steaua in 2003, from where his elevated status gave him a platform for his anti-globalisation, ultra-nationalist views. He has railed against women and homosexuality, been an MP and MEP, and had an unsuccessful run at becoming president of his country.

Famed for his garish attire as much as for his loose mouth and sharp tongue, there are those who claim Becali was Donald Trump before Donald Trump was Donald Trump.

But in 2013 he was sent to jail for two years for corruption connected to a land-swap deal with the army that netted him a huge fortune. By the time of his release a court had ruled that Steaua had been sold improperly and the army still owned the club that beat Barcelona to win the 1986 European Cup. Steaua's crest, colours, history and trophies all reverted back to the army, who are now in the process of reforming CSA Steaua Bucharest, a team that is likely to play in the Romanian fourth division next season.

Becali is appealing the court's decision and will hear soon whether he can use the name Steaua.

What's the current situation? Does your team still carry the name Steaua Bucharest?
I have changed the name. At the moment, this club is not Steaua. Legally. I changed the name so I can take the UEFA licence on June 1 and I don't need to change it afterwards. The name doesn't matter that much. Steaua is the club supporters know as Steaua. The supporters need to recognise it as Steaua. The name is not that important. Eighty-five per cent of Steaua fans voted that no matter what the name is legally, they think my club, this club I own, is actually Steaua.

Do you feel you've been wronged, that someone is taking your club away from you?
I am meeting you in my house because I love people. I love all the people coming in good will to visit me. Foreigners might be richer, but Romanians are richer in terms of love. You came all the way to Romania and you wanted to talk to me. How could I say no? It wouldn't be a nice gesture for me. You are here because I love people and everyone coming in good faith. You are welcome! Maybe there will be some foreign investors, American investors, who read your story. We Romanians like Trump's politics.

What do you mean?
Nationalism, religion, anti-globalisation. I'm referring to myself now. Politicians, in general, wanted Hillary [Clinton] to be president of the United States because she is part of a globalist, neo-Marxist way of doing politics, which is financed with loads of money and she is a left-wing politician. I spoke in an interview and contradicted a lot of people when Trump ran. I said that if Trump can become president, God will cancel the apocalypse. He will put the apocalypse on hold. Maybe the world's leaders realised that the world is not going in the right direction and allowed Trump to become president.

Do you see yourself in Donald Trump?
Political analysts in Romania say I am the Romanian Donald Trump. It is too big of a comparison for me to be able to say that. It is too much because I have common sense. And what Trump is doing right now is a pillar to save the world. I can not compare myself to what he is doing. He is a much bigger personality than I am. He is not an angel, he is not a saint, but God chose, through him, to cancel the apocalypse. From this point of view, I am happy with who I am. I don't want to compare myself with anyone else. If I am envious of someone I would only be envious of the lives of the monks and saints of the orthodox church. Apart from monks and saints, I wouldn't want to live another man's life. I am happy with the life I am living now.

When did you first fall in love with Steaua?
I became rich, and when a man becomes rich he wants to become famous. That is why I took over at Steaua. And I became famous. I had a big trial in my life. I was convicted in jail and spent two years in a penitentiary. That changed my entire life. I see life differently now. I am not interested in celebrity. I am not interested in anything else but going to heaven and living in heaven. All I have, all my fortune, I want to give it back to Christ. I am now working to build two hospitals. I want to give all my fortune to Jesus through donations, hospitals and churches. When we die we don't take anything with us. Everything stays with us on Earth. If you do good things on Earth, with the fortune you have, you take your fortune from Earth to heaven. And I really want to take my good deeds with me in heaven. I want to serve Christ and do the best I can.

Was it dangerous being in prison?
I was a leader in jail, a man who is born a leader, leading in the jungle, in jail, on the roof, everywhere. I am a born commander. I am that kind of man. I was Becali in jail. People had to respect that I am Becali.

What were the conditions like?
Conditions were bad, but for me it wasn't bad. I was a member of the European parliament and the Romanian parliament. I had better conditions. I was respected. I felt respected in jail.

What was an average day in prison like?
I would wake at 7am, pray in the morning for two hours, then do things to pass time, a long prayer in the evening and sleep. I used to read a lot.

What did you learn from prison?
In jail I learned the biggest thing I never knew. In jail I learned what Jesus' love really means. I read a lot. And I realised what going to heaven really means. The most precious time I ever had in my life was when I was being kept in jail. That was the most valuable time I spent here on Earth. Jail is when you are closest to God. Nowhere can you be closer to God than when you are in jail.

Why did you attended the [anti-corruption] protests in your country?
I went to the protest because there were

hundreds of thousands of people there, very close to my palace, a few hundred metres away. And I thought it was common sense to do what I did. People were coming from all over the country; how would it have been if I didn't go there? I was so close. It was a sign of solidarity from me. I wanted to show that I am loved by the people. I think I am the only public person who could go there without an escort or bodyguards. I went there to be with the people. I went there as a simple man. If I didn't agree with the protests, I wouldn't have gone there.

And yet many people would argue that you are the embodiment of what they are protesting against...
I don't care about myself. I am the richest man alive because I don't need more than I already have. I don't need more. That is what the saints say. I don't need anything from myself. It is love which doesn't allow me to rest to be a humble man. It is love that doesn't allow me to be an introvert. Everything I do is for the people. I'm not interested in power. If power interests me it is to help the weak.

> "I don't care about myself. I am the richest man alive because I don't need more than I already have...I'm not interested in power. If power interests me it is to help the weak"

You've made quite a few controversial statements in the past about women. Aren't men and women equal?
[Laughs] If a woman is number one you can not be sure of success. It is not discrimination, it is to do with biblical teaching. A woman can not lift as much as a man can lift. Women shouldn't be exposed to what a man is exposed to. She could be a surgeon, she could be leader, she could be a soldier, she could be a general. A woman can do everything very well, but there is one thing she can't do: she cannot be number one. The decision must not be hers because the man is the head of the woman, like Christ is the head of the church. I think women work harder than men, they pay attention to every detail. If you want a chief of staff, hire a woman. She concentrates. She works a lot. But she must not be number one.

Are you a fan of women's football?
Do you see how ugly it is? I don't enjoy watching women's football. And women's boxing, have you watched women's boxing? It is ugly. I don't like it.

Will there ever be a Steaua women's team?
I don't think about having a women's team at Steaua. If there is equality why doesn't Real Madrid have a female player. Let Chelsea have two or three women. I don't enjoy watching women's football. Women should just be protected by men. We can do whatever they want, but God's law is just one. The things we do that God doesn't think is right, he might be laughing at us from heaven. I hope you are not upset with me. I am saying things I think I should based on the religious side of things. For me truth is only God's word. I am not going left or right; straight to God's will that the Holy Saints and Father have said. Again, it is not a sign of discrimination. I feel people should be protected and women should be protected, and that is why I don't like women's boxing and football.

Battle...Steaua's Adrian Popa (left) takes on Gael Clichy of Manchester City in a Champions League qualifier this season

Do you still get the same excitement when you see Steaua play?
I don't feel the same joy as I watch football as I am not the same person I used to be. I don't like Earthly things as much as I used to. It is a joy to watch football and watch Steaua win, but it is less than it used to be in the past. My biggest joy is to go to the church. My priority is my relations with God. Things happening on Earth with football are not my biggest concern. I want to go to heaven. That is my biggest preoccupation right now.

Why not sell the club, rather than go through all the trouble, the fights with the army, the money?
I am a born warrior. I am fighting for justice, until the last breath, and what is mine. And I have it because I deserve to have it and worked for it. And no one can take it from me by force. I will never abandon it because of blackmail. Until I die I will fight for justice and truth. I will never retire from Steaua.

What is the correct outcome for all this?
A correct decision is that Steaua remains Steaua – and I firmly believe that this will be the case. The final appeal at the Supreme Court will make justice and I hope they will give me the name back. To make the big objectives you need to make big sacrifices. We don't have big resources. Big things need big sacrifices. We don't have much money to invest. We don't have it in Romania. I still think I can do big things at

Steaua. We don't have billions of euros like the Premier League, Spain, France, other countries. We don't have the money or investment.

If you were to lose the case, and barred from using the name "Steaua", what will you change the club name to?
This team will be Steaua forever. It is not important what is written – it is important what is written in the heart. On the heart of this team you have Steaua written. From your heart and mind nothing can be erased just because they want to. It is impossible.

There's also talk of a €40million fine for you. What would happen if the court decides to levy that?
It is not going to happen. Compensation must be decided by the court. Everybody can sue anybody and ask for big damages to be paid. That doesn't necessarily mean they are right. There is no compensation I should pay because they are not putting things right. Zero euros.

Is there any truth in those reports that suggest you might change the club's name to FC Becali?
If I would use my name in the club's official name I would upset the fans. The fans would go mad, and I don't want that to happen. I don't want to upset the fans. If I use any name to replace Steaua they will still think it is Steaua. I will not use my name at this club. You have to let the fans feel a part of the club. If you call the club FC Sport Becali, the fans will not feel part of the club. This was only a solution, an idea that came up to me when I was very upset. But it won't happen. The fans must feel important and respected.

Women's teams... Chelsea (in blue) and Wolfsburg

European champions...Steaua after beating Barcelona

Let's say next season there are two Steauas. What future does your team have?
They [CSA Steaua Bucharest] cannot participate in a high level of competition because the law doesn't allow a team held by a government department or political department, like defence ministry, to be part of the first league. So they need millions of euros to invest in the club, two or three years to get in first or second league. But they need the money. They don't have it. They need €10m a year. Steaua is the team that performs for the fans, wins trophies, plays games. The results will come with Becali. I know how to do that and I have the money to continue doing that. I want to do great things with Steaua. But big sacrifices will need to be made. The money doesn't come from my pocket but from God's will. I don't want to say "I did this" or "I did that". It is God acting through me.

Is your club divinely blessed?
[Pause] When you have a company, say, a vineyard, the grapes and the production of the vineyard are not thanks to the workers. It is God's gift and God's will towards the owner of the vineyard. God blesses the owners of the vineyard. The workers are just people who are paid to do their jobs. For me, Steaua is a business and God will help me after my heart and not my players' hearts because this is my heart and my business. My players are just here to serve this club and are paid to do so. But if God will help this Steaua team, he will help me. Nothing can be done without God's will. Steaua beat Chelsea 1-0; the salary of one player is the entire value of the Steaua team. What I did with Steaua is only something to do with God. It is God's blessing. It is impossible to do those things with these resources against the teams we are competing against. Football is a war of money. Our budget is €10m a year. And clubs in England have €400m budgets. You can not compete. It is impossible. Teams abroad have a world-select team. And we only select players from Romania or other countries at our level. I did what I did only because God helped me.

Interview by James Montague

A few weeks after this interview, the Romanian Football Federation approved FC Steaua Bucharest's name change. For now, the club will be known as FC FCSB, although he denied that the name stood for FC Sport Becali.

The army's lawyer, meanwhile, demanded that Steaua – who have a good chance of winning the title – have all their points docked for changing their name. The battle for Steaua's soul, and its name, continues.

Glenn Moore

Stars line up for stopgap league

Spring Series attracts big names

It says much for the rising strength of the English domestic game that it has managed to assemble its most star-studded cast for its least consequential competition since the FA finally committed to women's football.

The Spring Series is the FA's solution to the scheduling difficulties created by moving the Women's Super League from summer to winter and it is destined to be little more than a historical footnote, yet it has attracted the World Player of the Year, a triple-gold-medal Olympian, Norway's captain and the star players of Scotland and Switzerland

The seasonal switch – brought on by a desire to harmonise the WSL with the international calendar, the Women's Champions League and the men's Premier League (whose clubs increasingly share support staff) – left the FA with a 10-month gap to fill between campaigns. They also had to provide games to get the national team match-fit for the Euros. Thus this odd competition, in which the teams play each other once, creating a home-away imbalance, and with no promotion or relegation between the two divisions.

> English women's football does not pay its way and without the backing of a men's club, teams are in danger of being left behind

It was initially feared clubs would use it as a development league, a warm-up for the next full WSL season. Instead, the trio who are beginning to pull away from the pack, Manchester City, Chelsea and Arsenal, look like using it to lay down a marker for the future.

City, admittedly aided by the bait of the Champions League, lured World Player of the Year Carli Lloyd to Manchester; Chelsea have recruited talented US team-mate Crystal Dunn, Swiss striker Ramona Bachmann and Norway skipper Maren Mjelde; Arsenal have brought in American legend Heather O'Reilly, persuaded Scot Kim Little to return from Seattle and signed promising Sunderland striker Beth Mead. Sizeable salaries are rumoured to have been paid – and up to £250,000 a year in one case.

Clash...Jess Carter of Birmingham City Ladies (in blue) is challenged by Arsenal's Fara Williams

The sums involved have revived thoughts of a salary cap. English women's football does not yet pay its way and teams without the backing of a wealthy, committed men's club are in danger of being left behind, unable to match continental powerhouses such as Lyon, Paris Saint-Germain and the leading German clubs.

The other concern is whether the steady influx of foreign players will affect the England team. So far, Sampson and the FA are relaxed, and with around two-thirds of WSL players eligible for England, the overseas recruits tend to be high-quality players who the native talent should learn from. Arsenal's young English defender Gemma Rose has already commented on the benefits of training alongside O'Reilly.

O'Reilly herself said that, having won all there is to win in the US, that the FA Cup, with its Wembley Final, was a big attraction. And the quest began well with the holders defeating north London rivals Tottenham Hotspur 10-0 on her debut. However, Arsenal then lost in the last eight at Birmingham, whose reward was a home semi-final against Chelsea, with Manchester City hosting Liverpool in the other tie.

While O'Reilly and Arsenal were left to focus on the league, the most motivated team once the Spring Series kicks off may well be Chelsea. Besides being WSL and FA Cup runners-up in 2016, several individuals will be looking to make a point having been omitted from the England squad for Euro 2017.

Having steered England to bronze in the 2015 World Cup, and victories over Germany and the US, Sampson has earned the right to select whoever and whenever he wants. However, naming his final squad three months early, and before the domestic league began, was a surprise. Only four players from the 2015 squad missed out, and three were from Chelsea: 2016 WSL golden boot winner Eniola Aluko, midfielder Katie Chapman, and left-back Claire Rafferty, (with injured Leanne Sanderson the fourth).

While Chelsea are favourites for the title, with Arsenal and Manchester City

Promoted...Yeovil Town Ladies won WSL 2 last year

Newbie...Ramona Bachmann of Chelsea

chasing them hard, what of the rump? Liverpool were WSL champions in 2013 and 2014 but seem to have been by-passed since, although they have signed veteran Casey Stoney, released by Arsenal, to strengthen their defence and England striker Jess Clarke from Notts County.

Birmingham are without managerial duo David Parker, who quit citing a lack of faith in the club's plans, and Marcus Bignot, who left to manage men's fourth-tier club Grimsby Town, but have signed Ellen White, scorer of the England goal that beat the US on American soil. Notts County have had a troubling off-season, due to financial issues with their men's club, but should join Liverpool and Birmingham in mid-table.

Having returned to a part-time set-up, Sunderland are likely to be battling to avoid the wooden spoon, with Melanie Reay replacing ex-Wimbledon striker Carlton Fairweather as coach. Coming up are Yeovil, who will miss the pregnant Helen Ward, and Bristol City. Relegated in 2015 as Bristol Academy, they are now under the wing of the men's club.

When the WSL began, memories of teams folding when the men's parent club lost interest – as seen at Charlton Athletic and Fulham – meant the FA favoured the stand-alone approach. But the costs involved in growing the game, and attracting players like Lloyd and O'Reilly, have led to recognition that, for the foreseeable future, the women's game will be inextricably tied to, and dependent on, the men's. WS

Round-up

Shining...Lyon's Alex Morgan takes on Wolfsburg

Best...Marta (below) has joined Pride

▼ MARTA SIGNS FOR PRIDE

In a major coup for NWSL's Orlando Pride, Brazilian striker Marta, the best-known and highest-paid female player of the last decade, signed a two-year deal. Pride, who came bottom of the league on debut last year, are majority-owned by Brazilian millionaire Flavio Augusto da Silva, who last year lured Kaka to partner club Orlando City.

Marta, now 32, is a five-time world player of the year.

▼ US STARS FACE OFF IN EUROPE

American interest in Europe's Champions League increased sharply with Alex Morgan facing Carli Lloyd in the semi-finals.

Morgan shone and hit a post as holders Lyon, watched by more than 14,000 fans, edged out Wolfsburg in the last eight; while Lloyd scored as Manchester City beat Danish side Fortuna Hjorring.

In the other semi-final Barcelona, the first Spanish club to reach this stage, will meet Paris Saint-Germain, after they beat Rosenborg and Bayern Munich respectively.

Following Wolfsburg's exit, coach Ralf Kellermann will step down at the end of the season while striker Anja Mittag joined Rosenborg, paving the way for Marta's exit.

Winners...France lift the She Believes Cup

▼ PLAYER DISPUTES OVER

Strike action was avoided in Ireland after a deal was struck with the FAI after Republic of Ireland players went public with complaints that included having to change into team tracksuits at airport toilets as they were not allowed to keep them.

Deal...the FAI backed down

Meanwhile, the dispute between US Soccer and their World Cup-winning team ended with an agreement extending to 2021. While not achieving the original aim of parity with the men, significant pay rises were negotiated, together with improved conditions.

▼ FRANCE SHINE

France warmed up for Euro 2017 by winning the She Believes Cup, beating England, drawing with Germany, then thrashing the US 3-0. The US hosts, experimenting with three at the back, also lost to England. In other spring invitationals, Switzerland beat South Korea in the Cyprus Cup and Spain overcame Canada in the Algarve Cup.

CHINA

The Chinese Way

Matchday in the Orient as China and South Korea, divided by the Yellow Sea, meet in a World Cup qualifier in Changsha, Hunan

Big news...publicity ahead of the game

Excited...a fan gets in the mood

Relaxed...the China bench take a selfie

Security...riot police move into position

Winner...China's Yu Dabao (second from top) scores the only goal of the game

Anticipation...China's team bus arrives at the ground

In control...security forces make sure the game goes ahead with no problems

Mouth-watering...two fans enjoy the game

Passionate...supporters give China and coach Marcello Lippi their backing

Hero...Yu Dabao

Read all about it... loud and proud

Flying the flag...the whole nation seemed to be backing Lippi's team

May 1997

Bad boy Romario back to his superstar best

Under the headline "He's Back! Meet the new improved Romario", Tim Vickery told the story of how Brazil's superstar turned bad boy "was overweight, overpaid and over the hill" 12 months ago. "Now he's back for Brazil and playing better than ever."

Vickery went on to explain: "There were times when Romario did not turn up for work. Now he arrives at Flamengo's training ground in a helicopter and leaves in a Porsche.

"After two years away, Romario is once more taking care of business."

And he proved it with a man-of-the-match performance in Brazil's 4-2 win over Poland – his first game for the national team since helping them win the World Cup in 1994.

"Just a few months after seeming to be nearing the end of his career, Romario has his sights fixed on another World Cup and is working hard on his fitness," continued Vickery.

"Not too many people can claim to understand Romario de Souza Faria. He has been his own man ever since his birth 31 years ago in a Rio slum, Jacarezinho – it means 'little alligator', appropriate since he's snapped the patience of many of his coaches.

"Doing things his way led him to a World Cup medal and the accolade of the world's best player. But then it led him astray."

The honour of being the best on the planet had by now passed on to his Brazil team-mate Ronaldo. A non-playing member of the victorious 1994 squad, Ronaldo had faced his own demons but had overcome them to become the key player in an emerging Brazil side that once again threatened to rule the world.

"Perhaps Ronaldo's rise was a blow to Romario's vanity," suggested Vickery. "At any rate, he decided that he had plenty more to show and set about developing a new role, tailor-made to combine with Ronaldo in the national team.

"After a career spent hanging on the shoulder of the last defender, Romario dropped back a few yards. Against Poland it worked to perfection. The goals were shared between the Barcelona duo of Ronaldo and Giovanni, but the platform was provided by Romario. He excelled in his new role of waiter, serving up sumptuous dishes for Ronaldo to finish off.

"One goal came from a quickly taken free-kick, a replica of a Maradona-Caniggia goal in the 1994 World Cup.

"The comparison with Maradona is valid. With his strength on the ball, low centre of gravity, feints and first-time touches, Romario occasionally brought back memories of the great Argentinian."

Junior, Romario's coach at Flamengo, had no doubts that Romario could play in this position at another World Cup.

"He's at the stage where he knows all the secrets of the game, the trajectory of the ball and the positioning of his opponents," explained Junior.

"He's at the peak of his maturity. The best could be yet to come." WS

Return...Romario cleans up his act

THE NO.1 INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL MAGAZINE
£2.20 MAY 1997
WORLD CUP ON LATEST
WORLD SOCCER
HE'S BACK!
Meet the new improved Romario
DORTMUND
Here comes Sammer
CANTONA
Why everybody loves Eric again
GALATASARAY FILIPPO INZAGHI BETIS FERNANDO HIERRO JUVENTUS HOLLAND

Reformed characters I: Romario

Reborn of Rio

Last year Romario was overweight, overpaid and over the hill. Now he's back for Brazil and playing better than ever. Tim Vickery profiles the bad boy who cleaned up his act

THERE were times when Romario did not turn up for work; now he arrives at Flamengo's training ground in a helicopter and leaves in a Porsche.

After two years away, Romario is once more taking care of business. "He is still in the elite of world football," said the *Jornal do Sports* after his man-of-the-match performance in Brazil's 4-2 win over Poland earlier this year, his first game for the national team since the World Cup Final. Just a few months after seeming to be nearing the end of his career, Romario has his sights fixed on another World Cup, and is working hard on his fitness.

At the Flamengo training ground he warms up on the exercise bike, before taking to the field for some finishing practice. One of his eyes is red and swollen – the result of an exchange of kicks and punches in a recent game. His opponent was suspended for four matches, but Romario went unpunished. There was an outcry in the media, but Romario was unbothered; controversy always marked him closer than any centre-back.

Ronaldo's tone is cold and defiant, his voice a Tysonesque lisp. "I went through an insecure phase, where I couldn't find the right path," he says.

"Then, I decided to overcome my personal problems. I promised myself I would return to the Brazil team. I trained hard and went to sleep early. Zagallo gave me a chance and I couldn't blow it."

Not too many people can claim to understand Romario de Souza Faria. He has been his own man ever since his birth 31 years ago in a Rio slum, Jacarezinho (it means 'little alligator', appropriate since he's snapped the patience of many of his coaches). Doing things his way led him to a World Cup medal and the accolade of the world's best player. But then it led him astray.

When he moved back from Barcelona to join Flamengo at the start of 1995, a few dark voices said that football was the last thing on his mind, that he wanted to live like a beach playboy. A messy separation from his wife (soon to launch her memoirs) and a host of 'nightclub incidents' lent weight to this view. He pulled out of the Brazil squad for a game against Slovakia in February 1995. Coach Zagallo was not pleased.

At club level, Romario got by on natural ability. He hardly trained, and his lack of physical preparation showed in muscle injuries. He still scored goals, but his contributions were fitful. He had become a luxury player, memorably compared by one journalist to the owner of a sauna ("He makes money from the sweat of other people.")

An ill-judged move to Valencia last summer ended with him soon being loaned back to Flamengo; in his first game back he limped off with a muscle strain after 35 anonymous minutes, and the end was in sight.

"I've known Romario for seven years," says Nilton Petrone, a physiotherapist who has played a big part in his comeback. "With his talent and his exceptionally strong physique, he's a genius. He used to say that he would retire at 28. I always told him that he could play until 35 or 36. He's always played within himself, never used 100 per cent of his physical capacity, so he still has a lot left to give.

"Two factors have been fundamental. His family life is returning to normality [he has married again, and his new wife is expecting a child] which gives him an emotional balance. Also, he had a strong desire to return to the national team."

Match-winner...Romario starred against Poland

'Romario could play another World Cup. He's at the peak of his maturity. The best could be yet to come' – Flamengo coach Junior

Perhaps Ronaldo's rise was a blow to Romario's vanity. At any rate, he decided that he had plenty more to show, and set about developing a new role, tailor-made to combine with Ronaldo in the national team. After a career spent hanging on the shoulder of the last defender, Romario dropped back a few yards.

Junior, the flying left-back from the 1980s, is now Flamengo's coach, and helped Romario adapt to his new position. "He's been playing this way for Flamengo since the turn of the year," explains the now white-haired Junior. "He has other talents as well as finishing ability and his burst of acceleration over 10 or 15 metres. He also has good vision, and can pass with extreme precision.

"He was being marked very tightly, so he decided to drop deeper, from where he can slip through passes for someone else to carry out his original function as goalscorer."

Against Poland it worked to perfection. The goals were shared between the Barcelona duo of Ronaldo and Giovanni, but the platform was provided by Romario. He excelled in his new role of waiter, serving up sumptuous dishes for Ronaldo to finish off.

Romario says: "In training I saw how Ronaldo moves, so everything was in my head for the game. It's easy to play with him – and he showed that he wanted to play with me."

One goal came from a quickly taken free-kick, a replica of a Maradona-Caniggia goal in the 1994 World Cup. The comparison with Maradona is valid. With his strength on the ball, low centre of gravity, feints and first-time touches, Romario occasionally brought back memories of the great Argentinian.

Zagallo was ecstatic, praising "his participation in the team's movement" and the way "he opened up spaces and gave passes to his team-mates". Junior says: "I have no doubt that Romario could play another World Cup in this new position. He's at the stage where he knows all the secrets of the game, the trajectory of the ball and the positioning of his opponents. He's at the peak of his maturity. The best could be yet to come."

The Fall and Rise of Romario

- July 94 – Wins World Cup with Brazil in USA
- December 94 – Voted world's best player by FIFA.
- January 95 – Returns to Brazil to join Flamengo.
- February 95 – Makes a tame debut in a 0-0 draw with Fluminense; begins process of separation from his wife, Monica; pulls out of Brazil squad for friendly against Slovakia.
- June 96 – Flamengo lose Rio Championship after a last-minute defeat by Fluminense.
- August-December 95 – So-called 'dream attack' of Romario, Savio and Edmundo is a complete flop in the Brazilian Championship.
- June 96 – A Rare high spot. Flamengo win Rio State championship.
- July 96 – Returns to Spain to join Valencia.
- October 96 – After losing his place, Romario is loaned back to Flamengo; limps off in return game, as Flamengo crash out of the Brazilian championship.
- January 97 – After working hard in pre-season, Romario returns to form in spectacular style in the Rio-Sao Paulo tournament.
- February 97 – Recalled by Mario Zagallo to the national team for the first time since the 1994 World Cup Final; gives an outstanding performance as Brazil beat Poland 4-2.

14 WORLD SOCCER

"Doing things his way led him to a World Cup medal and the accolade of the world's best player. But then it led him astray"

Also in this issue...

p6
A number of red cards were brandished by referees during two important World Cup qualifiers in South America, with Brian Homewood reporting: "Argentina had two players sent off during a 2–1 defeat by Bolivia in La Paz, and two of South America's biggest names, Jose Luis Chilavert and Faustino Asprilla, were dismissed in the match between Paraguay and Colombia in Asuncion."

Kicking and screaming

p16-17
Two years after attacking a fan, Eric Cantona was inspiring Manchester United in Europe. Keir Radnedge wrote: "It is no coincidence he has emerged just as United have become the first English club to reach the quarter-finals of the Champions League since 1985."

Monsieur Adorable

p18-19
Borussia Dortmund's Matthias Sammer was European Player of the Year and jokingly told Arthur Rotmil: "At last a German has won this trophy who has never played for Bayern."

Sammer time

p22
In a Club Focus, Graham Turner chartered the revival of one half of Andalusia, where Real Betis were competing with the big boys of Spanish football. He wrote: "The green and whites are making their fans dream's come true. While Sevilla are on their third manager and toiling mightily to avoid relegation, Betis have been rampant in league and cup, have broken all sorts of club records and have their sights set on gate-crashing the Champions League."

Good outside Betis

10 years ago

Stuttgart pip Schalke to claim an unexpected Bundesliga title on the last day of the season. However, they miss out on the double when they are beaten 3–2 by Nuremberg after extra time in the German Cup Final.

20 years ago

Roy Hodgson leads an Internazionale side containing Paul Ince to the Final of the UEFA Cup. Inter lose the first leg 1–0 to Schalke, but a late Ivan Zamorano goal in the return takes the game to extra time and then penalties, which the Germans eventually win.

30 years ago

Diego Maradona inspires Napoli to their first-ever Serie A title win. The team finish three points clear of Juventus in the league and go on to complete an Italian domestic double as they beat Atalanta 4–0 in the Italian Cup Final.

40 years ago

Kevin Keegan plays his last game for Liverpool and helps them win their first European Cup with a 3–1 victory over Borussia Monchengladbach. Five days later, he joined German club Hamburg in a £500,000 transfer.

50 years ago

Manchester United win their first title since the 1958 Munich air disaster. Matt Busby's team clinch the league in style with a 6–1 win away to West Ham United, before parading the trophy at Old Trafford on the final day of the season.

MISCELLANEOUS

No surgery
No Medication
No Risk
No Complication

Advanced Hair Regrowth Clinic (London)

2 Latitude House Oval Road NW1 7EU

Call now to book your appointment at +44 7918528880

or

Email to ngmilly@gmail.com

www.advancedhairregrowth.com

① Stop Hair Loss
② Revitalize Hair Follicle to start to grow hair
③ Strengthen & Volumize existing Hair

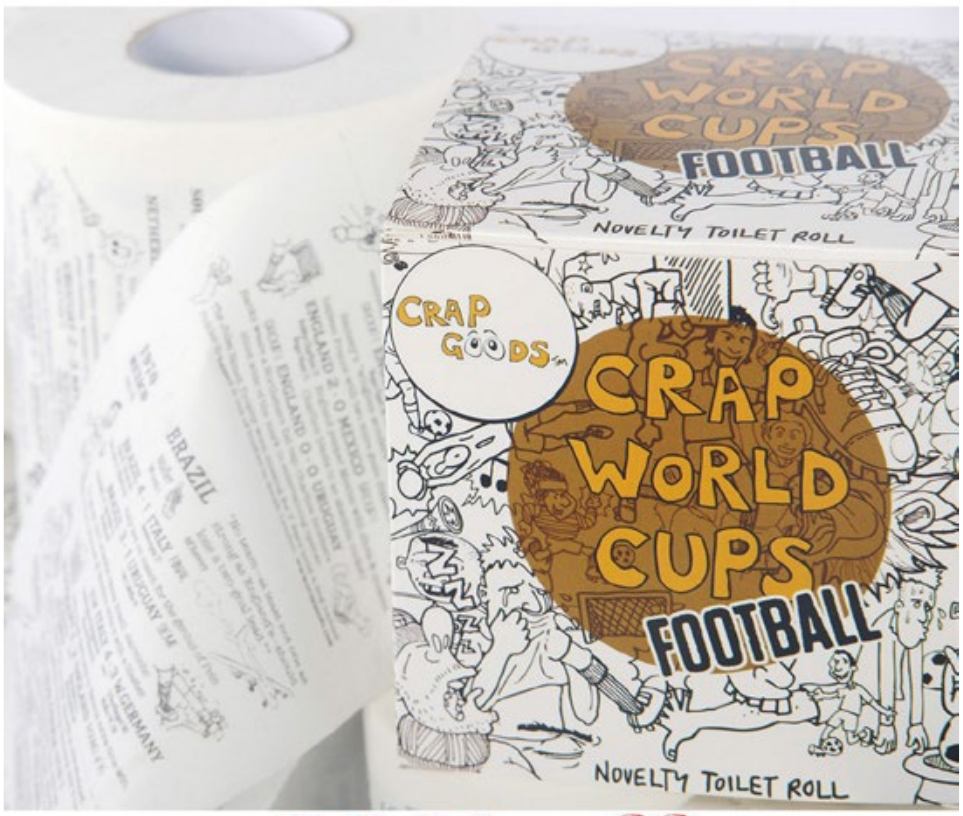
ADDING PRESTIGE TO YOUR IMAGE

Customised Ties, Embroidered Badges, Wooden Plaques, Scarves, Umbrellas, Metal Enamelware, Golf club badges & Blazers, Promotional Products

FILASPUN UK

For more information call 01274 880072
email filaspun@btinternet.com
or visit www.filaspun.co.uk

England's story. On a bog roll.



20% off

Use discount code WORLDSOCCER

crapgoods.com

PROGRAMMES

FREE

FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES

To receive a FREE programme plus a copy of our latest catalogue (listing several thousand different mint condition Big Match, League, Scottish, Irish, Foreign and Non-League teams programmes etc.) please send your name and address to:

STEVE EARL FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES (DEPT.WS)
BROAD STREET, BUNGAY, SUFFOLK, NR351AH, ENGLAND
or phone 01986 892621 or visit www.footballprogs.co.uk

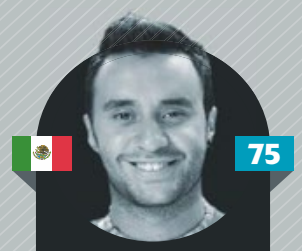
The 2017 F.A. CUP SEMIS (Arsenal v Man.City & Chelsea v Spurs) £8 each (inc.p&p)

(Credit/Debit Cards & PayPal accepted)

World Service

NOW INCORPORATING Global diary

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents



MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER
Mexico
75

OLEG ZADERNOVSKY
Ukraine
76

NICK BIDWELL
Germany

78

KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT
Holland

80

KEIR RADNEDGE
Hungary

82

PLUS

70

Qualifier...Bolivia (in green) stop Argentina

REVIEW
70 World Cup qualifiers

DIARY
74 Comprehensive global news

RESULTS, TABLES, FIXTURES
84 Internationals
89 Club

80

Success...French League Cup winners PSG

South America

TIM VICKERY

Brazil are first on the plane

Tite's side book their place in next year's World Cup finals

It now seems extraordinary to recall that, going into last September, Brazil were sixth in the qualifying table and fretting about missing out on the World Cup. Then, in came coach Tite, and eight consecutive wins later they became the first team to qualify.

Their place in Russia was confirmed by two impressive victories. They had to come from behind – a test they had never faced before under Tite – before sweeping Uruguay aside 4-1 in Montevideo. And then in Sao Paulo they won 3-0 against a Paraguay side that had played a fine first half.

Neymar has hit top form, and Tite's team is managing to combine traditional, individual Brazilian flair with quick-passing movements that in recent years have been the hallmark of the best European sides. With over a year to go to the finals, the fear now in Brazil is that the team might have peaked too soon, or that an excess of euphoria might derail the nation's hopes.

The other big winners of the double header were Colombia,

who climbed from sixth to second after beating Bolivia 1-0 at home and Ecuador 2-0 away.

Still a work in progress, Colombia have used 41 players in the campaign – 10 more than the teams around them – which is an astonishing amount given that they have not changed coach. Jose Pekerman may seem unsure of what he wants, but the evidence of these two rounds is that he looks to be inching towards something interesting.

The big losers in March were the early leaders, Uruguay and Ecuador, both of whom accumulated two defeats.

For the Uruguayans, going down to Brazil and then 2-1 to Peru was particularly galling. They have now lost their last three matches, despite having taken the lead in all of them They have started to leak goals, which in no small way would seem to be linked to the decline of key defensive midfielder Egidio Arevalo Rios, who was dropped for the trip to Peru.

Brazil were sixth in the qualifying table...in came coach Tite, and eight consecutive wins later they became the first team to qualify

Flair...Neymar takes on Paraguay

After taking the maximum 12 points from their first four games, Ecuador have added just eight more from the subsequent 10 rounds.

With the bulk of their squad now based abroad, a debate rages at home as to whether the altitude of their usual international base of Quito remains the advantage it once was. More to the point, the team is highly dependent on a small group of players. Should they lose form or fitness, results inevitably suffer.

Venezuela picked up just one point, in a 2-2 draw with Peru, but they are already building for 2022 and are showing interesting signs. Peru followed that draw up with their gutsy win against Uruguay that keeps their dream alive. The crunch game will be September's visit to Ecuador.

The remaining four teams – Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Paraguay – all picked up three points, winning one game and losing another. The vital match here was the clash between Argentina and Chile in Buenos Aries. This, of course, was the game in which it appeared that Lionel Messi swore at the linesman and picked up a bizarrely harsh four-game ban.

Highlighting the team's dependence on him, they then lost 2-0 away to Bolivia at the extreme altitude of La Paz. With Messi in this campaign Argentina have five wins in six games, without him they have just one win in eight.

Against Chile his penalty – controversially awarded – proved the difference between the sides in a game Argentina were fortunate to win. Once again they were horribly laboured and disjointed. But it was a vital win over direct rivals – which come the end of the campaign will probably be enough to get them over the line. **WS**

ARGENTINA'S PROBLEMS MOUNT

Argentina plan to appeal the four-match ban imposed on Lionel Messi for abusing assistant referee Marcelo Van Gasse after being penalised for a foul during the World Cup qualifier at home to Chile.

Messi served the first game of his ban in a 2-0 defeat away to Bolivia, a result that led to the sacking of coach Edgardo Bauza after just eight months in charge.

FIFA said Messi was guilty of "having directed insulting words at an assistant referee" and added: "This decision is in line with the FIFA Disciplinary Committee's previous rulings in similar cases."

The Argentinian FA confirmed it will appeal the ban, saying: "The decision doesn't correspond with the reality based on what was put in the referee's report."

The incident was not initially reported by Brazilian referee Sandro Ricci after Argentina beat Chile 1-0 in Buenos Aires, Messi scoring the only goal from a first-half penalty.

Television pictures clearly showed Messi reacting angrily late in the game when assistant referee Emerson Carvalho flagged him for fouling an opponent.

He waved his arms and shouted insults at the assistant. After the game, Messi refused to shake hands with Carvalho.

The decision to part company with Bauza ended a messy two weeks in Buenos Aires, during which the rumour mill had churned out gossip of Bauza's sacking amid official declarations that his job was safe.

In fifth place in the South American qualification table, Buaza's Argentina looked shambolic on the field and they have not been helped by deep administrative problems.

That is why Bauza was hurriedly rushed into the job in the first place. The chaos and power vacuum at the heart of Argentinian football made itself evident during last year's Copa Centenario in the USA.

The players complained that the logistical side – flying them around the country – was being handled poorly, and this was clearly a contributory factor in Messi's decision, announced immediately after the final, to retire from international football.

All over...Edgardo Bauza

Not long afterwards coach Gerardo Martino, thoroughly frustrated by unpaid wages and the chaotic build up to the Olympic tournament, also jumped ship.

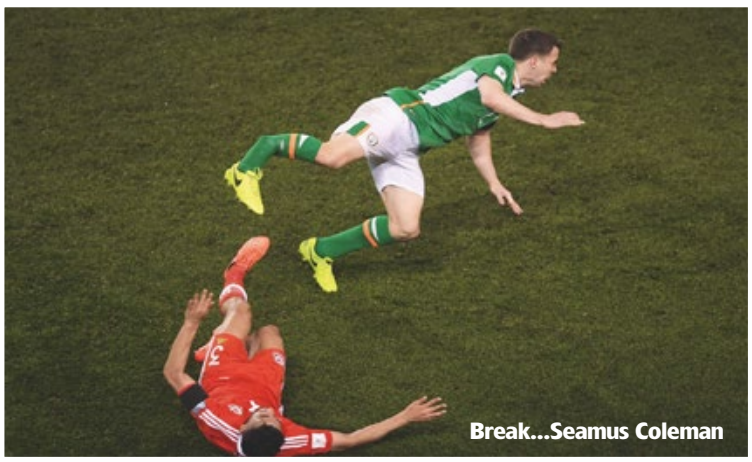
Bauza was hurriedly brought in as a replacement. His first victory – the major triumph of his brief reign – was to persuade Messi to rethink. But things became more difficult as soon as the ball started rolling, which was hardly a surprise.

The AFA has targeted former Chile coach Jorge Sampaoli to replace Bauza but his club, Sevilla, unhappy at the approach, attacked the AFA for showing them a "lack of respect".

Whoever is appointed will face Brazil in a friendly in Australia in June, which will provide an opportunity to consider options ahead of the visit to Uruguay in the next crucial round of qualifiers at the end of August.

Europe

GAVIN HAMILTON



Break...Seamus Coleman

Review

Big guns on course for Russia

Switzerland and Germany lead the way

At the halfway stage of the qualifying campaign, all the major teams remain on course, though Spain and Italy are locked together in Group G, and European champions Portugal will finish behind Switzerland in Group B unless they can win their crucial meeting in October.

France stayed top of Group A after a 3-1 win in Luxembourg. Monaco teenager Kylian Mbappe made his debut as a second-half sub but the goals came from the familiar faces of Olivier Giroud (two) and Antoine Griezmann.

Victories for Sweden and Bulgaria piled the pressure on Holland, who sacked Danny Blind after the defeat in Sofia.

Sweden enjoyed a comprehensive 4-0 win over Belarus, while Bulgaria remain unbeaten after five games following their win over the Dutch.

Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 69th and 70th International goals as Portugal beat Hungary 3-0 in Lisbon, but they remain in second place in Group B, three points behind Switzerland, who beat Latvia 1-0 in Geneva.

Group C leaders Germany maintained their 100 per cent record with a 4-1 win in Azerbaijan while Northern Ireland are still in second place after a 2-0 win over Norway.

Czech Republic were boosted by a 6-0 win in San Marino and moved into third place.

Unbeaten Serbia continued their revival as they moved to the top of Group C following a 3-1 win in Georgia while the Republic of Ireland played out a feisty 0-0 draw in Dublin with Wales. Swansea defender Neil Taylor was sent off for a wreckless foul that broke the right leg of Seamus Coleman.

Carried...Pepe gets a lift from Cristiano Ronaldo

Austria, who travel to Ireland in June, got their campaign back on track with a 2-0 win over Georgia in Vienna.

Poland strengthened their position as Group E leaders with a 2-1 win at closest rivals Montenegro.

Denmark and Romania played out a 0-0 draw and Armenia remain in contention after a 2-0 win over Kazakhstan.

Group F leaders England remain the only team yet to concede a goal, beating Lithuania 2-0 at Wembley. Scotland left it late to beat Slovenia 1-0 at Hampden Park, while Slovakia, who won 3-1 in Malta, remain in second place.

Italy beat Albania 2-0 in Palermo in a match that was temporarily suspended when flares were thrown by the away supporters. Spain remain on top on goal difference after they turned on the style to beat Israel 4-1 in Gijon.

Group H leaders Belgium needed a late equaliser from Romelu Lukaku at home to Greece to stay top ahead of the revived Greeks, while Bosnia are still in the reckoning after a 5-0 thrashing of Gibraltar.

Group I leaders Croatia edged past Ukraine in Zagreb thanks to a lone goal from Nikola Kalinic. Iceland moved up to second after winning 2-1 against Kosovo. Turkey beat Finland to keep their qualifying hopes alive. WS

Asia

JOHN DUERDEN

Iran are nearly there

Carlos Queiroz's side are just one win away from Russia

China may have been hogging the Asian football headlines of late, but in qualification for the 2018 World Cup it is Iran who are taking centre stage. And it is no more than they deserved as Asia's best-ranked side over the last four years according to FIFA. With three games remaining, they need just one more win to be sure of finishing in the top two in Group A and progressing automatically to the finals in Russia.

Carlos Queiroz deserves plenty of credit for Team Melli's success. The former Real Madrid coach took over in 2011, led the country to the 2014 World Cup and is now about to deliver a first-ever successive appearance.

Huge credit must also go to a defence that has not been breached in any of the 630 minutes of qualification action in this round, while an impressive backing saw more than 78,000 people flock to the Azadi Stadium in Tehran to see their latest outing – a 1-0 win against China.

Mehdi Taremi, a striker with local side Persepolis, scored the only goal of the game, upstaging bigger names such as Sardar Azmoun, the striker based in Russia with Rostov who has been linked with Liverpool, and Heerenveen's Reza Ghoochannejhad, who is the Dutch league's second top scorer.

With such firepower it seems strange that Iran have scored just six goals, but with those clean sheets being so constant the goals have earned five wins and two draws.

For China, Taremi's strike brought the side down to earth after an impressive 1-0 win at home to South Korea five days earlier. When the final qualifying round started in September, Chinese fans were just happy to see their side as one of the final dozen and were not demanding a second World Cup appearance. But, even so, just two points from the first five games was depressing.

Appointing Marcello Lippi as coach in October was expensive – rumoured to be a cost of around £50million – but it did provide a step in the right direction. And with just one win in their 31 previous meetings against their neighbours, this was a great moment at which to banish "Koreaphobia" – the term given to the Chinese fear of the seemingly unbeatable Koreans.

Defeat in Changsha puts South Korea's hopes of a ninth World Cup appearance in a row under threat and coach Uli Stielike under pressure. The Taeguk Warriors bounced back, to an extent, in their next game with a nervy 1-0 win over Syria in Seoul to stay second, a point above Uzbekistan, but Stielike may not survive, with fans and media increasingly critical.

Solid...Iran keep out China's Gao Lin

With Iran virtually certain of qualification, the race for the second spot is likely to go to the final round of matches on September 5, when Uzbekistan host South Korea in Tashkent.

Group B is a little more interesting, with Saudi Arabia and Japan level at the top on 16 points after they both picked up back-to-back wins in the latest round of games.

Bert Van Marwijk has breathed new life into Saudi Arabia, and a first World Cup since 2006 is on the cards, but their next game is crucial. If they can avoid defeat in Adelaide in June they will be able to start thinking about 2018; lose and they will be level on points with Australia, who are currently in third, with two games remaining.

> **Huge credit must go to Iran's defence, which has not been breached in any of the 630 minutes of qualification action in this round**

Australia ended a run of four successive draws with a 2-0 win over a disappointing United Arab Emirates in Sydney. The UAE and their golden generation of players were tipped to make it through but, with the pressure on to deliver, they have been found wanting and Mahdi Ali resigned at the post-match press conference, ending his five-year tenure as coach.

With three teams chasing two automatic qualifying places in each group, the UAE – like Syria in Group A – are in fourth, with a slim chance of third spot and a chance via the play-off route.

Thailand, whose coach Kiatisuk Senamuang stepped down, and Iraq in Group B are already out, while Qatar in Group A are as good as gone. The 2022 hosts needed to qualify for 2018 to avoid being the first tournament hosts in the modern era never to have qualified on the pitch. But, after being one of the best performers in the previous qualification round, to have just four points from seven games is a huge disappointment. WS

Hope...Saudi Arabia celebrate beating Thailand 3-0

MARCH 18-APRIL 9, 2017

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Saturday March 18

BELGIUM: Sammy Bossut saves two spot-kicks as Zulte Waregem beat Oostende on penalties to win the Belgian Cup and earn a place in next season's Europa League group stage.
ENGLAND: Reigning champions Leicester City end an 11-month wait for an away win in the league as they beat West Ham United 3-2.
MALI: Despite both holding first-leg leads, Djoliba and Onze Createurs become the first casualties of Mali's suspension by FIFA as they are prevented from playing in the CAF Confederations Cup first qualifying round and effectively disqualified.
SOUTH AFRICA: CAF Champions League holders Mamelodi Sundowns survive a scare in Uganda, drawing 1-1 away at KCCA to progress to the group phase of the competition 3-2 on aggregate. Platinum Stars keeper Mbongeni Mzimela scores spot-kicks to book a place in the CAF Confederation Cup play-offs with a 3-1 victory over Uganda's Vipers that overturns their 1-0 first-leg loss.
SPAIN: Quique Setien says he will quit as Las Palmas coach at the end of the season after "irreconcilable differences" became apparent in contract negotiations with club president Miguel Angel Ramirez.

Sunday March 19

AUSTRALIA: Sergio Cirio makes it 2-1 for Adelaide United from the penalty spot in the eighth minute of stoppage time after Brisbane Roar goalkeeper Michael Theo is sent off when his elbow makes contact with Dylan McGowan's head.
ETHIOPIA: Saint George beat AC Leopards of Congo 2-0 to become the first-ever Ethiopian side to qualify for the group stage of the CAF Champions League.
GERMANY: Thomas Muller marks his 250th Bundesliga appearance for Bayern Munich with the only goal of the game as they win at Borussia Monchengladbach.
GREECE: Olympiakos lose 1-0 at Panathinaikos in the Athens derby.
HOLLAND: Justin Kluivert, the 17-year-old son of former Holland striker Patrick, scores his first goal for Ajax as they draw 1-1 with Excelsior in the Eredivisie.
REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: Derry City captain Ryan McBride passes away suddenly at the age of 27, the day after leading his team to a 4-0 victory against Drogheda United.
SPAIN: Zinedine Zidane's son Enzo misses a penalty and is sent off as Real Madrid reserves lose 2-1 to Athletic Bilbao B in Spain's third tier.

Monday March 20

FIFA: Ghanaian ref Joseph Lamptey is handed a life ban for what FIFA calls "match manipulation" after incorrectly awarding a penalty to South Africa against Senegal in a World Cup qualifier in November.
USA: Real Salt Lake sack Jeff Cassar just three games into the new MLS season and appoint goalkeeping coach Daryl Shore as caretaker boss.

No joy...Bolivia (in green) try to keep out Colombia

Tuesday March 21

IVORY COAST: Marc Wilmots, who was responsible for taking his native Belgium to the top of the FIFA World Rankings for the first time in their history, returns to international football as coach of Ivory Coast.

Wednesday March 22

DJIBOUTI: A 2-0 win against South Sudan in an African Nations Cup qualifier is Djibouti's first international victory since 2007.
DR CONGO: Thierry Froger leaves TP Mazembe by mutual consent following the five-time African champions elimination from the Champions League qualifiers at the hands of Zimbabwean side CAPS United on Sunday.
GERMANY: Lukas Podolski scores the only goal of the game as Germany beat England in his last international appearance.

Thursday March 23

BOLIVIA: A 1-0 loss in Colombia sees Bolivia equal Luxembourg's record of 53 away games without a win in qualifying matches.
BRAZIL: Paulinho scores a hat-trick as Brazil win 1-0 in Uruguay and record an eighth successive victory since Tite became coach.
ENGLAND: Everton agree to buy land at Bramley-Moore Docks on which to build a new stadium.
GREECE: Takis Lemonis is named coach of Superleague leaders

Hero...Zulte Waregem keeper Sammy Bossut

Olympiakos for a third time.
SOUTH KOREA: Uli Stielike beats Huh Jung-moo's mark of 911 days to become South Korea's longest-serving coach of all time, but the German's celebrations are cut short as his side lose 1-0 to China.

Friday March 24

ARMENIA: Manchester United midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan receives a sixth successive Armenian Player of the Year award and for a seventh time in total.
COMOROS: A 2-0 victory against Mauritius is only the second victory for Comoros in the 17 Nations Cup qualifiers they have played since their debut in 2007.
ITALY: In his 1,000th career game, Gianluigi Buffon keeps a clean sheet in Italy's 2-0 victory over Albania and sets a new European record with his 168th cap.
MEXICO: Javier Hernandez scores in Mexico's 2-0 victory over Costa Rica to become his country's ➤

Joy...Javier Hernandez celebrates equalling a Mexican record

Mexico

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Refs take action

Strike could see players create new union

Mexican fans are used to extraordinary events. Doping bans, prostitution scandals, last-minute rules made up to save teams from relegation, teams sold or disbanded because of links with drug dealers. However, the events of March 11 shocked even those supporters.

For the first time in the history of Liga MX, games were suspended at the last minute as referees took industrial action and went on strike.

A few days earlier, America centre-back Pablo Aguilar, a 29-year-old Paraguay international, and Toluca's Argentinean striker Enrique Triverio were both guilty of assaulting officials in their respective Copa MX games – an offence that carries a one-year ban. The clubs, however, put pressure on the Mexican federation to ban Aguilar for just 10 games and Triverio for eight.

At first that seemed like the end of the matter, but then the referees let it be known they were unhappy with the punishments and that they were planning a protest. And that protest went far beyond what anyone had expected.

An hour before kick-off in the first game of Liga MX's matchday 10, between Veracruz and Puebla, referee Luis Enrique Santander was instructed to leave the stadium. The Mexican Association of Referees (AMA) had decided to go on strike.

Until then, barely anyone in Mexico had known that the referees had a union. But from that moment on the AMA's importance became quite clear. Liga MX's controllers tried to find replacement refs from other countries and even approached the Mexican amateur leagues, but all the officials contacted refused to break the strike.

In the end, the owners of the league clubs – the people who have the real power in Mexican football – announced they would "allow AMA to appeal the decision regarding the two players' bans" – and so the year-long suspensions were re-imposed.

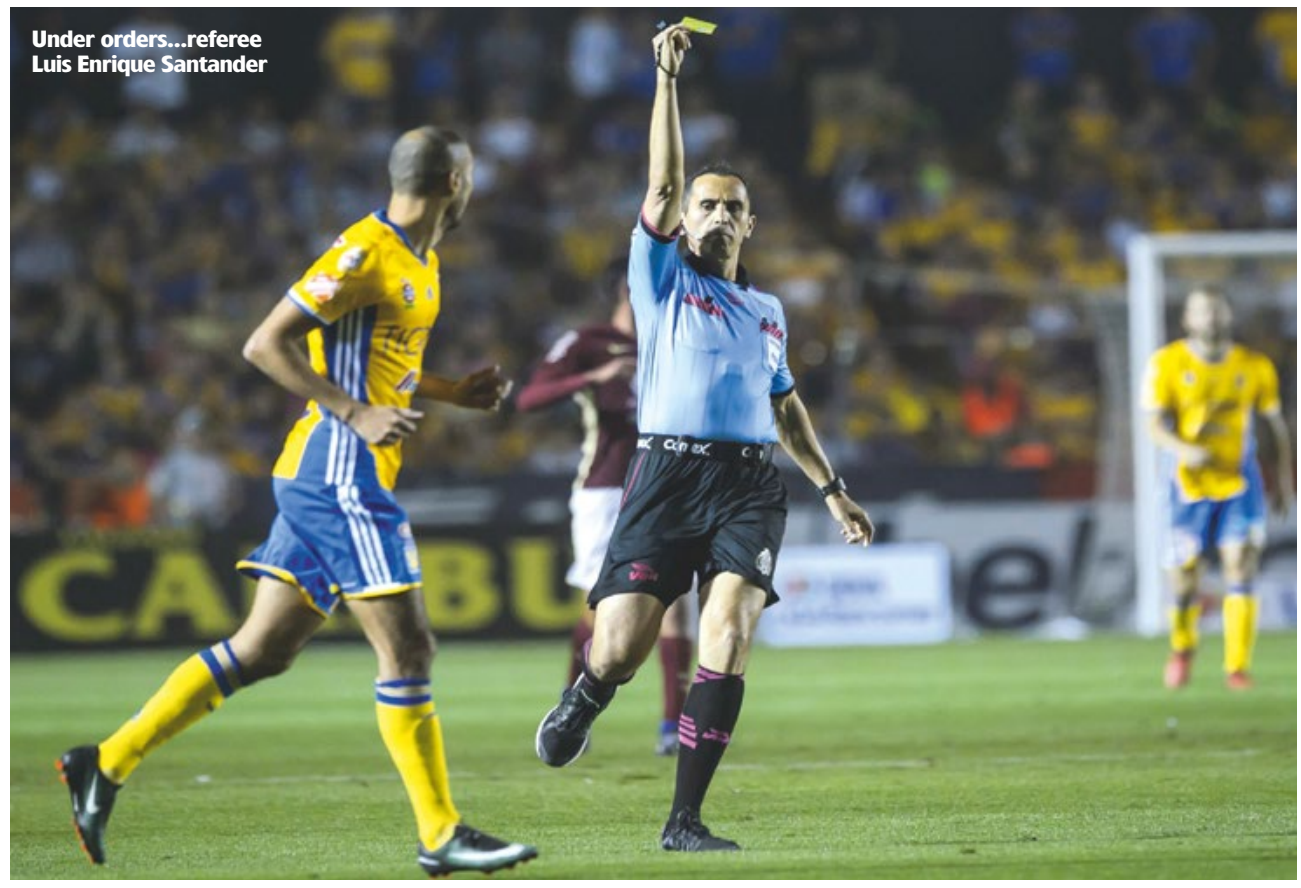
Having got what they wanted, the referees ended their strike the next day – and their success has sent a strong message to the country's players.

Although they are paid more than elsewhere in South America, Mexico's players have no control over their careers. The change of FIFA rules derived from the Bosman Ruling never reached Liga MX, so clubs in Mexico can transfer players without consulting them, even when they are out of contract.

There is no proper players' union in Mexico, but the referees' strike is seen as the call to arms for the players to stand up for their rights.

Captain of the national side Rafael Marquez has already announced that he is working alongside other internationals on a union project.

Perhaps, then, the next surprise in Mexican football will be the most unexpected of them all: that under the wing of the former Barcelona defender the players will be united at last. WS



Under orders...referee Luis Enrique Santander

➤ joint-top scorer of all-time with 46 goals.
USA: After a year's absence with an irregular heartbeat, Clint Dempsey returns to international football with a hat-trick in the USA's 6-0 victory over Honduras.

Saturday March 25

ANDORRA: A goalless draw against the Faroe Islands brings Andorra's run of 58 consecutive qualification defeats to an end and sees them collect their first point in more than 11-and-a-half years.
AUSTRALIA: Brisbane Roar's 1-0 win against Melbourne Victory means that Sydney are this season's Premier champions.
PORTUGAL: Cristiano Ronaldo scores twice in Portugal's 3-0 win against Hungary to go fourth in the list of Europe's all-time top scorers, with 70 international goals.
SOUTH AFRICA: A 3-1 win against Guinea-Bissau sees South Africa set a new national record run of 16 games without defeat.
SPAIN: Barcelona's reserve-team stadium will be renamed the Estadi Johan Cruyff to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of their former coach and player.

Sunday March 26

BRAZIL: A 23-year-old fan, who was attending his first match according to local media reports, dies after falling from the top of Sao Paulo's Morumbi Stadium during a 1-1 draw with Corinthians.
ENGLAND: A 2-0 win at home to Lithuania maintains England's record as the only team in Europe yet to concede a goal in the World Cup qualifiers.
KENYA: Michael Olunga celebrates his 23rd birthday with both goals in Kenya's 2-1 victory over DR Congo.
POLAND: Robert Lewandowski scores in a 10th consecutive qualifier as Poland beat Montenegro 2-1.

Monday March 27

CROATIA: Dinamo Zagreb midfielder Arijan Ademi has a four-year doping ban halved after CAS rules he did not intentionally cheat when testing positive for the steroid stanozolol after his side's Champions League win over Arsenal in September 2015.
FRANCE: A friendly between Ivory Coast and Senegal in Paris has to be abandoned at 1-1 when fans invade the pitch in the 88th minute.
HOLLAND: Danny Blind is sacked as national coach following Saturday's 2-0 loss to Bulgaria, with under-21 coach Fred Grim ➤

Ukraine

OLEG ZADERNOVSKY

Dreaming of Donbass

Shakhtar find success despite being forced from their home

Barcelona's famous "More than a club" motto could easily be applied to the current life of Ukraine's most successful club of recent times, Shakhtar Donetsk. In exile since the second half of 2014, they have had to take shelter in Kiev, with their Donbass Arena home having ceased to be a football stadium. Instead, until recently, it was a humanitarian-aid centre, distributing food parcels to local people affected by the military conflict with pro-Russian separatists.

Almost eight years ago, nobody could have imagined the scale of the tragedy. In 2009, Ukraine's president, Viktor Yushchenko, unveiled the first football stadium in Eastern Europe that was designed and built to UEFA's five-star standards. He addressed the crowds saying: "Victories be yours, Donetsk and Donbass. Victories be yours, Ukraine, here in Donbass Arena. I wish you all, the people of Donetsk, glory, happiness and joy."

Rinat Akhmetov, the club's owner and the richest man in the country, added: "We built this stadium for you. Come to us and enjoy football." His words were welcomed by 45,000 people with a standing ovation. A performance from Beyonce and an Olympic-style show of mining-themed dancers added spectacular elements to the opening ceremony.

Two years later, in May 2011, another pop star, Rihanna, helped the arena to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the most professionally run club in the Ukraine.

The new stadium became a symbol of Shakhtar's success. The club won five league titles in a row, while the Donbass Arena attracted more than 5.6million fans, including four million at Ukraine Premier League matches and almost one million at Champions League encounters. Football-related business at the stadium also prospered, providing its services to more than 1.3 million visitors. In addition, matches involving Ukraine's national team and Euro 2012 games were seen by more than 300,000 supporters.

Committed...Darijo Srna (centre) in Europa League action

Help...the Donbass Arena has been used as an aid centre

> "I feel connected with Donetsk and no one can break such a bond. My heart belongs to Shakhtar"
> Darijo Srna

The happy years, however, were short-lived. When Brazilian winger Douglas Costa scored eight minutes from time in a league game against Illichevets Mariupol on May 2, 2014, no one could have imagined that it would be Shakhtar's last at the Donbass Arena. Soon after, pro-Russian separatists gained control over territory in the south-east of the Ukraine and the leaders of so-called Donetsk People's Republic attempted to seize the assets of Akhmetov.

And when the Shakhtar owner refused to pay taxes to the pro-Russian separatists, his possessions became their target.

A "Peace Match" was organised at the Donbass Arena but it did little to help the situation, and as the military conflict intensified the team and staff were evacuated to Kiev. "We were told we had to leave quickly," remembers Shakhtar's Croatian skipper

Photo: NurPhoto/REX/Shutterstock

Darijo Srna. "I even did not take anything from my home where I had lived with my family for almost 13 years. We were happy there."

Shakhtar are now in their third season away from Donetsk, first playing in Lviv and now in Kharkiv. The £350m Donbass Arena became a humanitarian aid hub for the long-suffering locals, most of whom supported Shakhtar, with more than a million people receiving help. "For me the Donbass Arena is the best stadium in the world," says Srna. "Great players performed there and fans created unbelievable atmosphere.

"Now, instead of tickets they have to go to their stadium to receive survival kits."

But with the club's training centre and its nine pitches now seized by the separatists, the Donbass arena has also been closed by order of the leadership of the Donetsk breakaway republic, leaving a huge number of people without help.

"At present all entrances and exits at Donbass Arena are blocked by armed men," says Shakhtar's CEO, Sergei Palkin. "Technical staff and office workers are not able to get into the stadium."

Yet despite all their problems, on the pitch Shakhtar are heading for a first Ukraine Premier League title since operating in exile.

Under Portuguese coach Paulo Fonseca, they were unbeaten in the 22-game regular season, opening up a 14-point gap over reigning champions Dynamo Kiev, who are in second place.

"Of course, psychologically it has been very difficult," says Srna. "We play constantly away, in front of empty stands. The players, coaches and, of course, our president, are real heroes.

"I do not know any other club facing such extremely difficult circumstances that could achieve this."

The dream of returning to his adopted city helps to motivate Srna, who adds: "I have never cheated or betrayed the club. I feel connected with Donetsk and no one can break such a bond. My heart belongs to Shakhtar.

"Even in the most difficult days, I felt great support from the president, fans and the city. Now, the least I can do for Donetsk – and somehow thank all the people – is to continue to defend the honour of the club, lead the team to the new victories and trophies and to wait for the time when we get back to the Donbass Arena." WS

Donbass...local people queue for food parcels

A long way from home

➤ taking charge of Tuesday's friendly against Italy.
ITALY: Napoli's Maurizio Sarri, who led his side to second place, is named Serie A's coach of 2015-16, ahead of Massimiliano Allegri, whose Juventus won the title, and Eusebio Di Francesco of Sassuolo.

Tuesday March 28

ARGENTINA: Lionel Messi is given a four-match ban for directing insulting words at an assistant referee during Argentina's 2-1 victory away to Chile last week.
BRAZIL: A 3-0 victory at home to Paraguay sees Brazil become the first team to qualify for next year's World Cup finals in Russia.
CHINA: A fire at Shanghai Shenhua's Hongkou Football Stadium is quickly contained, with local media reports suggesting damage is restricted to the outside of the venue.
NEW ZEALAND: Ryan Thomas scores both goals as New Zealand beat Fiji 2-0 to secure a place in Oceania's World Cup play-off Final.
NICARAGUA: Juan Barrera scores three late goals as Nicaragua beat Haiti 3-0 to win 4-3 on aggregate and qualify for the Gold Cup.
OMAN: Abdulaziz Al Muqbali scores six as Oman set a national record by beating Bhutan 14-0 in the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers.
PORTUGAL: Cristiano Ronaldo scores on his home island of Madeira the day before the local airport is named in his honour, but Portugal surrendered a two-goal lead and lose 3-2 to Sweden.
RUSSIA: Alexander Bukharov gets an injury-time equaliser as Russia come from two goals down to draw 3-3 with Belgium in the first game to be staged at Sochi's Fisht Arena.
SERBIA: Partizan Belgrade's three-year suspension from Europe is lifted after it is ruled they have cleared their tax bill.
SOUTH SUDAN: A 6-0 thrashing of Djibouti is South Sudan's biggest-ever victory.
UAE: Mahdi Ali resigns as UAE coach after a 2-0 loss away to Australia in World Cup qualification.
USA: Clint Dempsey scores in a 1-1 draw with Panama to move within one of Landon Donovan's all-time record of 57 goals for the USA.

Wednesday March 29

EGYPT: Al Masry train at their home stadium for the first time since a riot in 2012 that led to the death of more than 70 Al Ahly fans. However, they are still not allowed to host competitive matches at ➤

Germany

NICK BIDWELL

Low on quality striking talent

National team in need of natural goalscorers

At the same time that Lukas Podolski was ending his glittering 13-year international career with a wonder-goal winner against England in Dortmund, it is ironic to note that these are far from the best of times for German marksmen in the Bundesliga.

While overseas stars such as Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang (Borussia Dortmund), Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich) and Anthony Modeste (Cologne) reign supreme in the scoring charts this term, only two locally sourced players – RB Leipzig's Timo Werner and Sandro Wagner of Hoffenheim – have been scoring on a regular basis. And even they require binoculars to see the Big Three *goleadors* in the distance.

Nor is the foreign domination of the *Torschutzenkonig* race a new phenomenon. Over the last 15 years, just five Germans have lifted the replica canon awarded to the top scorer. And of that elite band, only Miroslav Klose in 2005-06 and Mario Gomez in 2010-11 were/are genuine international performers.

Way back in the midsts of time, Germany used to be a land where prolific strikers were on every corner; goal machines like Fritz Walter, Uwe Seeler, Gerd Muller, Jupp Heynckes, Klaus Fischer, Rudi Voller and Jurgen Klinsmann. But now the dinosaurs are extinct. No longer does the German game supply its own finishers. These days, the clubs have to buy abroad and, inevitably, this spells trouble for the *Bundestrainer*, Joachim Low.

With Klose quitting the *Nationalmannschaft* in the wake of the World Cup triumph of 2014, and with Podolski now following suit, the goalpoacher talent pool is shallow indeed, often forcing Low to use Mario Gotze or Thomas Muller in the false nine role – a position which does not especially suit either.

Low's only other line-leading alternatives are to stick with Gomez – who, to his credit, did a good job at Euro 2016 – or bed in 21-year-old Werner as quickly as possible. The latter might not have impressed in the friendly against England, but he is one for the future.

Ever since he dived for a penalty in a game against Schalke in December, Werner has been public enemy number one at many Bundesliga grounds. But with his explosive speed and energy he could make a difference for Germany and Low could do far worse.

Two-goal Andre Schurrle was the surprise hero of Germany's 4-1 World Cup qualifying win in Azerbaijan. After swopping Wolfsburg for Dortmund last summer, the wide midfielder has been unable to hold down a regular place with his new club and had managed just two goals in the Bundesliga by the start of April, so he would have been mightily relieved to bag a double on his first *Nationalmannschaft* start since October 2015.

And Schurrle is not the only German international struggling to put the ball in the domestic-league net with even Bayern's Thomas Muller having a mere two strikes to his name during the same period.

A period of hard labour for the homegrown hit men. **WS**

On target...Hoffenheim's Sandro Wagner scores against Cologne

Prospect...Timo Werner

Joachim Low's only other line-leading alternatives are to stick with Mario Gomez or bed in 21-year-old Timo Werner as quickly as possible

Options...(left to right) Andre Schurrle, Mario Gomez and Thomas Muller

➤ their Port Said base.
GERMANY: Schalke confirm that defender Benedikt Howedes will miss June's Confederations Cup with Germany to undergo surgery on a long-standing groin injury.
NORWAY: Domestic double winners last season, Rosenborg open the new campaign with a 2-0 win over Brann in the Super Cup.
SOUTH AFRICA: World Players' Union FIFPro confirms Kenyan winger Clifton Miheso has filed a complaint to FIFA, claiming he was forced to terminate his contract with Golden Arrows at gunpoint.
USA: Mike Petke, who led New York Red Bulls to the MLS Supporters' Shield in 2013, is named coach of Real Salt Lake.

Thursday March 30

GERMANY: Hertha Berlin are to build a new 55,000-capacity home by 2025 as the Olympiastadion is deemed "no longer suitable".
SPAIN: Sevilla announce the departure of sporting director Monchi, who is regarded as being responsible for developing the youth system and scouting network during one of the most successful periods in the club's history.

Friday March 31

BELGIUM: Anderlecht kick off the play-offs with a 2-1 win at Zulte-Waregem, who finished third in the regular season.
SCOTLAND: Dundee lose 7-0 at home to Aberdeen – their heaviest defeat since they were beaten 8-1 by Celtic in 1971.

Saturday April 1

ENGLAND: Chelsea lose 2-1 at home to Crystal Palace, which allows Tottenham Hotspur to cut their lead at the top of the table to seven points with a 2-0 win at Burnley. Liverpool beat Everton 3-1 in the Merseyside derby.
FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain claim the League Cup with a 4-1 victory over Monaco in the Final.
GERMANY: Schalke draw 1-1 with Borussia Dortmund, while Robert Lewandowski scores a hat-trick as Bayern Munich thrash Augsburg 6-0. Danish midfielder Thomas Delaney also hits three as Werder Bremen win 5-2 at Freiburg.
PORTUGAL: League leaders Benfica are held to a 1-1 draw at home by second-place Porto.
UAE: Makhete Diop scores twice as Al Ahli beat Al Shabab 2-0 in the UAE League Cup Final.
USA: Bastian Schweinsteiger scores on his debut for Chicago Fire in a ➤

Holland

KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT

Oranje at an all-time low

After missing Euro 2016, things have got even worse

Holland face an almost impossible task if they are to avoid missing a second consecutive tournament. Even if they were to win all their remaining World Cup qualifiers, which include France away, it is not certain that they would be among the best runners-up in the European section.

And the *Oranje* will have to attempt the near-impossible without coach Danny Blind, who was put out of his misery after a disastrous 2-0 defeat away to Bulgaria in Sofia.

Yet even though everyone else agreed that Holland were heading down a dead-end street with Blind, the coach himself had a different opinion. In an astonishing statement he felt there was no need to fire him, claiming: "We are on the right track, this defeat was an incident."

An incident? During his 17 matches in charge of the national side, Holland had managed to beat only Kazakhstan, Luxembourg and Belarus. Had he forgotten that the side could still qualify for Euro 2016 when he took over? Don't defeats in all crucial qualifiers tell a different story? And what about the fact that a team that were number one in the FIFA world rankings in 2011 had dropped from 14 to an all-time low of 32 under his reign?

Blind was often accused of lacking experience – his only previous coaching job was a year at Ajax – and being biased towards the Amsterdam club. Familiar criticisms were levelled at him when 17-year-old central defender Matthijs De Ligt was handed a first cap and starting place in Bulgaria.

A rookie at the highest level, he made crucial mistakes in Ajax's games against Copenhagen and Excelsior, but according to Blind – who had followed his progress since playing for the club's reserves in the second tier – he was ready.

Within 20 minutes De Ligt had made two vital errors, allowing Spas Delev to score both times. The debutant didn't even come out for the second half, but the damage had been done. Afterwards Blind admitted that the youngster's debut had come too soon.

So who will take over as coach? Ronald Koeman, Frank De Boer and Giovanni Van Bronkhorst were all mentioned, but declined, while Sevilla's Jorge Sampaoli was reported to be interested.

It might, however, be better if the Dutch FA put

The end is nigh...Danny Blind reacts on the touchline during the defeat in Bulgaria

A team that were number one in the FIFA world rankings in 2011 had dropped from 14 to an all-time low of 32 under Danny Blind's reign

its own house in order first, before appointing a new national coach. At the moment there is only one board member, after Bert Van Oostveen resigned and the appointment of his successor, Gijs De Jong, was blocked by the clubs who weren't involved in the process.

That created an awkward situation with commercial director Jean Paul Decossaux, the only board member left, explaining Blind's sacking to the media, while technical director Hans Van Breukelen, notably Blind's boss, sat at the back of the room making no comment.

Many are convinced that only Louis Van Gaal can stop the decline, but after his third place at the World Cup in 2014 it is highly unlikely that he will return for a third spell. Instead, the FA is pushing to create a board job for him – and given Van Gaal's vast coaching experience, there must surely be question marks over Van Breukelen's position.

Days after Blind's resignation, FA boss Michael Van Praag said a new coach will be appointed very soon, but the Dutch FA will take its time, consulting players, coaches and other experts. After all, Dutch football can't afford another mismatch if it still wants to play a part in international football. **WS**

L to R...Gijs De Jong, Hans Van Breukelen and Jean-Paul Decossaux

➤ 2-2 draw with Montreal Impact.

Sunday April 2

HOLLAND: Ajax beat Feyenoord 2-1 and close the gap at the top of the table to three points.
SCOTLAND: Celtic wrap up their sixth consecutive league title with a 5-0 victory at Hearts.
SPAIN: Neymar nets his 100th goal for the club as Barcelona win 4-1 away to Granada.
ZAMBIA: ZESCO United win the season-opening Zambian Charity Shield, beating Nkana 2-0.

Monday April 3

SPAIN: Giuseppe Rossi scores a hat-trick as Celta Vigo beat Las Palmas 3-1.

Tuesday April 4

BRAZIL: Chapecoense beat Atletico Nacional 2-1 in the first leg of the South American Super Cup.
ENGLAND: Zlatan Ibrahimovic's last-minute penalty stretches Manchester United's unbeaten top-flight run to 20 games with a 1-1 draw at home to Everton.
GERMANY: Hoffenheim condemn Bayern Munich to a second league defeat of the season, winning 1-0 with a goal from Andrej Kramaric.
GHANA: Kwesi Appiah will take charge of the national side on a two-year contract, starting in May.
ITALY: Lazio lose 3-2 to Roma but reach the Italian Cup Final by winning 4-3 on aggregate.
MEXICO: Hirving Lozano grabs two late goals as Pachuca beat Dallas 3-1 and win their CONCACAF Champions League semi-final 4-3 on aggregate.
SCOTLAND: Aberdeen manage a 10th successive home win for the first time since the 1950s with a 1-0 victory over Inverness.
USA: St Louis' hopes of launching an MLS team are dented as the city authorities vote against re-directing $60m from existing tax revenue to help build a new stadium.

Wednesday April 5

ENGLAND: Manchester City are beaten 2-1 at Chelsea as Pep Guardiola loses home and away in the league to the same team for the first time as a coach. Liverpool are banned from signing academy players from other English clubs for two years after being found guilty of an "offer of inducements" to a 12-year-old from Stoke City.
HOLLAND: Table-topping Feyenoord beat bottom of the league Go Ahead Eagles 8-0.
ITALY: Three days after drawing ➤

➤ 1-1 away to Napoli in Serie A, Juventus lose 3-2 at the Stadio San Paolo but win 5-4 on aggregate to progress to the Italian Cup Final.
MEXICO: Tigres beat Vancouver Whitecaps 4-1 on aggregate and will face Pachuca in the seventh all-Mexican CONCACAF Champions League Final in nine years.
SPAIN: Alvaro Morata scores a hat-trick as Real Madrid win 4-2 at Leganes to stay two points ahead of Barcelona, who beat Sevilla 3-0 in Andres Iniesta's 700th appearance for the club.
URUGUAY: Nacional draw 1-1 at Penarol in the *Superclasico* and go a point clear of Wanderers at the top of the table. Manchester City announce they have bought second-tier side CA Torque.

Thursday April 6

BRAZIL: Recent wins over Uruguay and Paraguay mean that Brazil top the FIFA Rankings for the first time in seven years.

Friday April 7

AUSTRALIA: The A-League is the first domestic competition in the world to trial the new Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system as Melbourne City beat Adelaide United 1-0.

Saturday April 8

FRANCE: Radamel Falcao gets his 25th goal of the season as Ligue 1 leaders Monaco beat Angers 1-0.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich thrash Borussia Dortmund 4-1.
HOLLAND: Ajax put five goals past NEC for the second time this season, winning 5-1 in Nijmegen.
ITALY: Juventus beat Chievo 2-0 for a 32nd home league win in a row.
SPAIN: Neymar is sent off at Malaga as Barcelona lose 2-0 to goals from Sandro Ramirez and Jony, who have both been on Barca's books. Real Madrid score for a 52nd consecutive game but are held to a 1-1 draw at home by Atletico Madrid.
TURKEY: League leaders Besiktas win 4-3 at Trabzonspor.

Sunday April 9

FRANCE: Edinson Cavani scores twice as Paris Saint-Germain beat Guingamp to go within three points of Monaco.
ITALY: Third place beats fourth as Napoli win 3-0 at Lazio, while Internazionale lose 2-1 at strugglers Crotone. Cagliari's Han Kwang-song becomes the first North Korean to score in Serie A as his side lose 3-2 to Torino. WS

Hungary

KEIR RADNEDGE

Magyars on the up

Things are looking good, on and off the pitch

World Cup runners-up in 1938 and 1962, triple Olympic gold medallists and third at the 1964 European Championship, Hungary has rich footballing history. But after elimination at the 1986 World Cup, they failed to qualify for a major tournament for the next 30 years.

However, things began to change for the better once again in 2010, with the rise to government of football fan Viktor Orban and his right-wing Fidesz party, and the election of Sandor Csanyi – the country's richest man – as head of the Hungarian Football Federation (MLSZ). Both had ambitions for sport, albeit for different reasons.

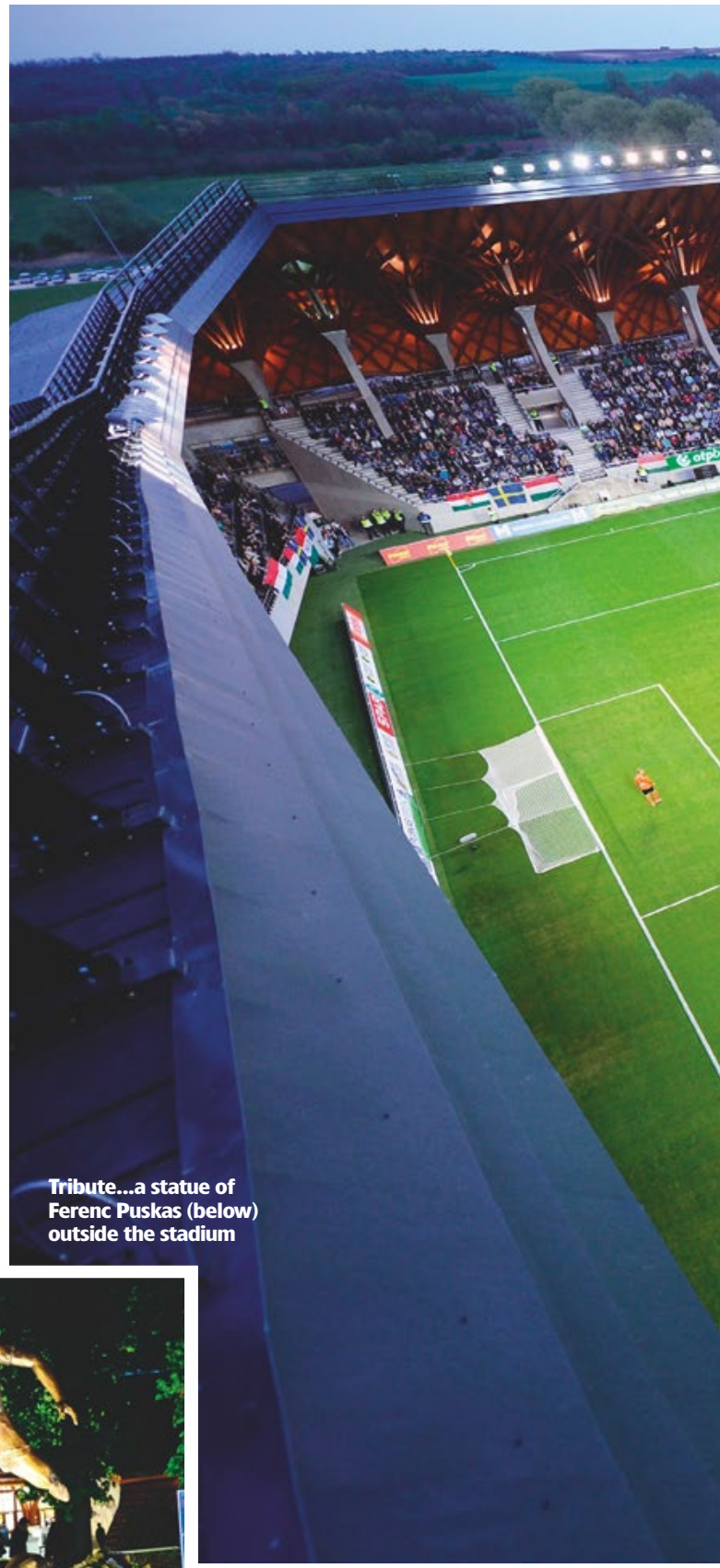
Football represented a potential symbol of both national pride and "soft power" in a complex new Europe. Csanyi points out that he was born in 1953, the same year Ferenc Puskas and his team-mates beat England 6-3 at Wembley. The legend of the "Golden Team" lived on down the years and is now being polished up, brighter than ever.

After becoming head of the MLSZ in July 2010, Csanyi moved onto the UEFA executive committee in 2015, and one year later the national team finally returned to the finals of a major tournament: Euro 2016 in France.

They needed a play-off victory over Norway to get there, but a famous victory over Austria, followed by draws against Iceland and Portugal propelled them into the last 16, where they finally succumbed 4-0 to Belgium.

Since 2010, some 31 stadia for clubs in the top two divisions have been redeveloped and 1,000 new pitches – both turf and artificial – have been laid down. The number of registered youth players has shot up by 25,000 accompanied by a 200 per cent increase in the number of female players. Some 250,000 players are now registered, double the total in 2010. As communication director Marton Dinnyes says with pride: "Now every village in Hungary again has its football team."

Some 10 miles outside Budapest is a new national team training centre, the Globall Football Park, at Telki. Construction including all essential fitness, accommodation and medical facilities was completed in 2009 with financial assistance from FIFA and UEFA.



Tribute...a statue of Ferenc Puskas (below) outside the stadium

Last year the centre hosted 56 separate training camps for the men's, women's and age-group national teams. Already more than 20 junior UEFA competition matches have been staged there.

But the momentum has not come from within the football community and Csanyi's drive alone; there is more to it than that. Orban's government, in something of a throwback to eastern Europe's old days, sees sport as a promotional vehicle.

Hence the magnificent new aquatic facility in Budapest which will stage the FINA World Swimming Championships in July. And then there was the bid to win hosting rights to the 2024 Olympics – although that was brought to a juddering halt by rising public

Impressive...the Pancho Arena in Felcsut

Driving force... prime minister Viktor Orban (left) and Sandor Csanyi (centre)

disapproval in February.

Prime Minister Orban's personal focus on sport is evident a few miles from the federation's training centre in his home village of Felcsut. Here, he launched a "charitable foundation" which built the magnificent Puskas Academy, with its Pancho Arena, although no one appears able or willing to say how much it cost.

Inside the stadium entrance a cupola is circled with busts of the great team that won at Wembley. In glass display cases there are reliquaries from Puskas' great years with Real Madrid – including his original contract – and subsequent adventures in Greece and Australia.

Telki and Felcsut present stark contrasts but, together, they add up to a modern revivalist momentum which has already brought results for the national team.

Earlier this year Csanyi was appointed to FIFA's powerful finance committee and he has also been voted to join the world federation's governing council. Hungary, it seems, are back...on the field and off it. **WS**

Internationals

2018 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

All remaining fixtures (all to be played this year) are beneath the relevant tables

ASIA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

3rd round

Group A

Mar 23 – Changsha
China 1 (Yu Dabao 34)
South Korea 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,950. **Ref:** Green (Aus)
China: Zeng Cheng – Zhang Linpeng, Mei Fang, Feng Xiaoting, Jiang Zhipeng, Zheng Zhi, Hao Junmin, Wang Yongpo (Yin Hongbo 60), Zhang Xizhe, Wu Lei (Wu Xi 46), Yu Dabao (Zhang Yuning 76).
South Korea: Kwoun Sun-tae – Kim Jin-su, Jang Hyun-soo, Hong Jeong-ho, Lee Yong, Ki Sung-yueng, Koh Myong-jin (Hwang Hee-chan 66), Nam Tae-hee (Heo Yong-joon 84), Koo Ja-cheol, Ji Dong-won, Lee Jeong-hyeop (Kim Shin-wook 46).

Mar 23 – Doha
Qatar 0
Iran 1 (Taremi 52)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,237. **Ref:** Liu (HK)
Qatar: Al Sheeb – I Majid, Khoukhi, Pedro Miguel, Y Abubakar (Ali Afif 81), Tabata (Almoez Ali 77), Boudiaf, Luiz Martin (Assadalla 61), Al Haidos, Soria, Akram Afif.
Iran: Beiranvand – Mohammadi, Montazeri, Ghafouri, Pouraliganji, Ezatolahi, Hajsafi, Azmoun (Shojaei 84), Taremi, Ansarifard (Amiri 71), Jahanbakhsh (Ebrahimi 78).

Mar 23 – Krubong, Malaysia
Syria 1 (Khribin pen 90+1)
Uzbekistan 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 350. **Ref:** Mohammed (UAE)
Syria: Alma – Jenyat, O Midani, Al Salih, Ajan, Haj Mohamad, Mobayed, Al Mawas (Al Khatib 85), Youssef (Al Jafal 75), Khribin, Mardikian (Al Nakdali 66).
Uzbekistan: Lobanov – Tukhtakhodjaev, Krimets, Ismailov, Khashimov, Haydarov, O Akhmedov, Masharipov (Shomurodov 55), Djeparov, Bikmaev (Geynrikh 78), Abdukholikov (Sergeev 64).

Mar 28 – Tehran
Iran 1 (Taremi 46)
China 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 78,115. **Ref:** Bin Jahari (Sin)
Iran: Beiranvand – Mohammadi, Montazeri, Ghafouri (Rezaeian 80), Ebrahimi, Ezatolahi, Pouraliganji, Shojaei, Ghoochannejad (Azmoun 72), Taremi, Jahanbakhsh (Amiri 88).
China: Zeng Cheng – Feng Xiaoting, Zhang Linpeng, Jiang Zhipeng, Mei Fang, Zheng Zhi, Zhang Xizhe (Huang Bowen 46), Wu Xi (Yin Hongbo 50), Yu Dabao, Gao Lin, Zhang Yuning (Wu Lei 46).

Mar 28 – Seoul
South Korea 1 (Hong Jeong-ho 4)
Syria 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,352. **Ref:** Makhadmeh (Jor)
South Korea: Kwoun Sun-tae – Kim Jin-su, Hong Jeong-ho, Jang Hyun-soo, Choi Chul-soon, Son Heung-min, Koh Myong-jin (Han Kook-young 54), Nam Tae-hee, Koo Ja-cheol (Hwang Ui-jo 86), Ki Sung-yueng, Hwang Hee-chan (Lee Jeong-hyeop 73).
Syria: Alma – Al Salih, Ajan, Al Shbli, Hadi Al Masri, Khribin, Al Mawas (Al Jafal 76), Youssef (Al Khatib 56), Haj Mohamad, Mobayed, Al Nakdali (Mardikian 86).

Mar 28 – Tashkent
Uzbekistan 1 (O Akhmedov 65)
Qatar 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 19,000. **Ref:** Sarray (Irq)
Uzbekistan: Lobanov – Krimets, Ismailov, Merzlyakov, Khashimov, Haydarov, Djeparov (Afonin 82), O Akhmedov, Rashidov (Bikmaev 60), Sergeev (Abdukholikov 86), Shomurodov.
Qatar: Al Sheeb – I Majid, Musa, Kasola, Pedro Miguel, Tabata (Assadalla 69), Luiz Martin, Y Abubakar, Al Haidos (Almoez Ali 78), Akram Afif (Abdullah 65), Soria.

WC QUALS – ASIA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	7	5	2	0	6	0	17
South Korea	7	4	1	2	9	7	13
Uzbekistan	7	4	0	3	6	4	12
Syria	7	2	2	3	2	3	8
China	7	1	2	4	3	7	5
Qatar	7	1	1	5	3	8	4

Jun 12: Iran v Uzbekistan.
Jun 13: Qatar v South Korea; Syria v China.
Aug 31: China v Uzbekistan; South Korea v Iran; Syria v Qatar.
Sep 5: Iran v Syria; Qatar v China; Uzbekistan v South Korea.

Group B

Mar 23 – Tehran, Iran
Iraq 1 (Yasin 76)
Australia 1 (Leckie 40)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,270. **Ref:** Kim Jong-hyeok (SKo)
Iraq: Hameed – Mhawi, Ibrahim, Sulaka, Adnan, Bahjat (Yasin 56), Abdul-Amir, Kamel (Ahmad 74), Ismail, Kalaf (Attwan 46), Abdul-Raheem.
Australia: Langerak – Degenek, Milligan, Wright, Jedinak, Luongo, Kruse (Smith 63), Mooy, Irvine (Troisi 82), Leckie, Juric (Cahill 72).

Mar 23 – Bangkok
Thailand 0
Saudi Arabia 3 (Al Sahlawi 26, Tanaboon og 84, Al Moasher 90+2)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 41,613. **Ref:** Al Samaheeji (Bhr)
Thailand: Kawin – Adison, Tanaboon, Pratum (Peerapat 46), Tristan, Pokklaw, Jakkaphan (Chappuis 63), Theerathon, Chanathip, Siroch (Adisak 68), Teerasil.
Saudi Arabia: Al Mosailem – Al Shahrani, Omar Hawsawi, M Hawsawi, Al Harbi, Al Khaibri, Al Faraj (Al Fatil 90), Al Shehri, Al Jassim, Al Abed (Al Moasher 70), Al Sahlawi (Hazazi 79).

Mar 23 – Al Ain
United Arab Emirates 0
Japan 2 (Kubo 14, Konno 52)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 23,725. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
UAE: Eisa – Salem, Hussain, Al Kamali, Sanqour, Barman, Esmaeel (M Abdulrahman 64), Al Hammadi, O Abdulrahman, Mabkhout, Matar (S Saleh 75).
Japan: Kawashima – Nagatomo, Morishige, H Sakai, Yoshida, Kagawa (Kurata 71), Yamaguchi, Konno, Haraguchi, Kubo (Honda 78), Osako (Okazaki 82).

Mar 28 – Sydney
Australia 2 (Irvine 7, Leckie 79)
United Arab Emirates 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 27,328. **Ref:** Al Kaf (Oma)
Australia: Ryan – Degenek, Milligan, Wright, Sainsbury, Troisi, Jedinak (Amini 89), Irvine (Kruse 82), Juric (Cahill 71), Smith, Leckie.
UAE: Khasif – Abbas (Matar 79), Salem, Sanqour, I Ahmed, T Ahmed (M Abdulrahman 38), Barman, Al Hammadi, O Abdulrahman, Mabkhout, Khalil (Esmaeel 55).

Mar 28 – Saitama
Japan 4 (Kagawa 8, Okazaki 19, Kubo 57, Yoshida 83)
Thailand 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 59,003. **Ref:** Kim Dong-jin (SKo)
Japan: Kawashima – Nagatomo, Morishige, H Sakai, G Sakai, Yoshida, Kagawa (Kiyotake 74), Yamaguchi, Haraguchi (Honda 66), Okazaki, Kubo (Usami 84).
Thailand: Kawin – Peerapat, Adison, Koravit, Tristan, Adisak, Tanaboon, Chanathip, Siroch (Nurul 73), Teerasil, Wattana.

Mar 28 – Jeddah
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Shehri 53)
Iraq 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 60,153. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)
Saudi Arabia: Al Mosailem – Al Shahrani (Al Burayk 46), Omar Hawsawi, Osama Hawsawi, Al Harbi, Al Abed (Al Moasher 69), Al Jassim, Al Khaibri, Al Faraj, Al Shehri, Al Sahlawi (Al Shamrani 75).
Iraq: Hameed – Mhawi, Ibrahim, Sulaka, Ismail, Yasin, Abdul-Amir, Attwan (Kamel 80), Adnan (Husni 58), Ahmad, Abdul-Raheem (Abdul-Zahra 64).

WC QUALS – ASIA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	7	5	1	1	14	5	16
Saudi Arabia	7	5	1	1	13	5	16
Australia	7	3	4	0	11	6	13
UAE	7	3	0	4	7	10	9
Iraq	7	1	1	5	7	10	4
Thailand	7	0	1	6	3	19	1

Jun 8: Australia v Saudi Arabia.
Jun 13: Iraq v Japan; Thailand v UAE.
Aug 31: Japan v Australia; Thailand v Iraq; UAE v Saudi Arabia.
Sep 5: Australia v Thailand; Iraq v UAE; Saudi Arabia v Japan.

Each team will play10 games (5x2)

● *The top 2 in both groups will qualify for the finals; the 2 3rd-placed countries will meet in the* **Asia section play-off**, *the winner of which will meet the 4th-placed CONCACAF country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

CONCACAF section

● *3.5 finals places available*

5th round

Mar 24 – Mexico City
Mexico 2 (J Hernandez 7, Araujo 45)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Pitti (Pan)
Mexico: Ochoa – Layun, Araujo, Moreno, Salcedo, Marquez (Molina 60), J Dos Santos, H Herrera, Vela, J Hernandez (R Jimenez 65), Peralta (Damm 46).
Costa Rica: Navas – Gamboa, Gonzalez, Acosta, Calvo, Matarrita, Azofeifa (Guzman 60), Borges, Bolanos (Campbell 54), B Ruiz, Venegas (Urena 79).

Mar 24 – Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Molino 37)
Panama 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Matamoros (Hnd)
Trinidad & Tobago: Jan-Michael Williams – C Edwards, Gonzales, Cyrus, M Williams, K George, Hyland, Cato (L Garcia 65), Molino (Hector 80), J Jones, K Jones (Boatswain 84).
Panama: Penedo – Machado (M Murillo 75), Baloy, R Torres, Ovalle, A Henriquez, Barcenas (G Torres 64), Cooper, Godoy, Quintero (Tejada 59), Arroyo.

Mar 24 – San Jose
United States 6 (Lletget 5, Bradley 27, Dempsey 32, 49, 54, Pulisic 46)
Honduras 0
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 17,729. **Ref:** Lopez (Gtm)
United States: Howard – Villafana, Gonzalez, Brooks (Ream 70), Cameron (Zusi 59), Bradley, Lletget (Bedoya 18), Pulisic, Dempsey, Nagbe, Altidore.
Honduras: Escober – Izaguirre (O Garcia 46), H Figueroa, M Figueroa, Alvarado, Beckeles, Claros, Espinoza, Quioto (Andino 43), Elis, Najar (Morazan 61).

Mar 28 – San Pedro Sula
Honduras 1 (Lozano 34)
Costa Rica 1 (Waston 68)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,800. **Ref:** Aguilar (ESv)
Honduras: Escober – Izaguirre, H Figueroa, M Figueroa, Beckeles, M Martinez (Discua 70), Claros, Espinoza, Najar (Andino 9; O Garcia 75), Elis, Lozano.
Costa Rica: Navas – Gamboa, Waston, Gonzalez, Umana (Guzman 46), Oviedo, Azofeifa (Bolanos 55), Borges, B Ruiz, Campbell (Tejeda 82), Urena.

Mar 28 – Panama City
Panama 1 (G Gomez 43)
United States 1 (Dempsey 39)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 23,052. **Ref:** Ramos (Mex)
Panama: Penedo – Machado, Baloy, R Torres, Ovalle, G Gomez (A Henriquez 80), Godoy, Cooper, Quintero (Barcenas 75), G Torres (Arroyo 83), Tejada.
United States: Howard – Zusi, Gonzalez, Ream, Villafana, Pulisic, Bradley, Jones (Acosta 75), Nagbe (Bedoya 69), Dempsey, Altidore (Arriola 82).

Mar 28 – Port of Spain
Trinidad & Tobago 0
Mexico 1 (D Reyes 58)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 14,822. **Ref:** Register (Jam)
Trinidad & Tobago: Jan-Michael Williams – David, Gonzales, Cyrus, M Williams, K George, Hyland (Boucaud 65), Cato (Plaza 80), Molino, J Jones, K Jones (Boatswain 65).
Mexico: Talavera – Salcedo (Gallardo 66), Araujo, Moreno, L Reyes, D Reyes (Pineda 74), Molina, R Jimenez (Vela 56), H Herrera, Layun, J Hernandez.

WC QUALS – CONCACAF – 5TH ROUND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Costa Rica	4	2	1	1	7	3	7
Panama	4	1	2	1	2	2	5
United States	4	1	1	2	8	7	4
Honduras	4	1	1	2	4	9	4
Trinidad & Tob	4	1	0	3	2	6	3

Jun 8: Costa Rica v Panama; Mexico v Honduras; United States v Trinidad & Tobago.
Jun 11: Mexico v United States.
Jun 13: Costa Rica v Trinidad & Tobago; Panama v Honduras.
Sep 1: Mexico v Panama; Trinidad & Tobago v Honduras; United States v Costa Rica.
Sep 5: Costa Rica v Mexico; Honduras v United States; Panama v Trinidad & Tobago.
Oct 6: Costa Rica v Honduras; Mexico v Trinidad & Tobago; United States v Panama.
Oct 10: Honduras v Mexico; Panama v Costa Rica; Trinidad & Tobago v United States.

Each team will play10 games (5x2)

● *The top 3 will qualify for the finals; the 4th-placed country will meet the winner of the Asia section play-off in a play-off for a place in the finals*

EUROPE section

● *13 finals places available (excluding the place for hosts* **Russia**, *who qualify automatically)*

Group A

Mar 25 – Sofia
Bulgaria 2 (Delev 5, 20)
Holland 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 10,900. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)
Bulgaria: Mihaylov – S Popov, Chorbadzhiyski, Bozhikov, Zanev (Nedyalkov 86), Slavchev, Manolev, Kostadinov, I Popov (Kraev 67), Tonev, Delev (Bodurov 88).
Holland: Zoet – Karsdorp, Martins Indi, De Ligt (Hoedt 46), Blind, Strootman, Klaassen, Robben, Promes (L De Jong 68), Wijnaldum (Sneijder 46), Dost.

Mar 25 – Luxembourg
Luxembourg 1 (Joachim pen 34)
France 3 (Giroud 28, 77, Griezmann pen 37)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 8,000. **Ref:** Treimanis (Lat)
Luxembourg: Moris (Schon 21) – Jans, C Martins, Chanot, Malget, Philipps, Bensi, Gerson, Mutsch (Bohnert 62), Da Mota (Rodrigues 81), Joachim.
France: Lloris – Sidibe (Jallet 62), Koscielny, Umtiti, Mendy, Kante, Matuidi (Rabiot 83), Dembele, Griezmann, Payet (Mbappe 78), Giroud.

Mar 25 – Stockholm
Sweden 4 (Forsberg pen 19, 49, Berg 57, Kiese Thelin 78)
Belarus 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 31,243. **Ref:** Lechner (Aut)
Sweden: Olsen – Lustig, P Jansson, Granqvist, Augustinsson, Durmaz (Claesson 85), Hiljemark, Ekdal (J Johansson 69), Forsberg, Berg, Toivonen (Kiese Thelin 74).
Belarus: Gorbunov – Shitov, Martynovich, Politevich, Filipenko, Bordachev (Volodko 69), Rios, Bressan, Maevski (Dragun 65), Gordeichuk, Signevich (Rodionov 71).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	5	4	1	0	10	3	13
Sweden	5	3	1	1	10	3	10
Bulgaria	5	3	0	2	8	10	9
Holland	5	2	1	2	8	6	7
Belarus	5	0	2	3	2	10	2
Luxembourg	5	0	1	4	6	12	1

Jun 9: Belarus v Bulgaria; Holland v Luxembourg; Sweden v France.
Aug 31: Bulgaria v Sweden; France v Holland; Luxembourg v Belarus.
Sep 3: Belarus v Sweden; France v Luxembourg; Holland v Bulgaria.
Oct 7: Belarus v Holland; Bulgaria v France; Sweden v Luxembourg.
Oct 10: France v Belarus; Holland v Sweden; Luxembourg v Bulgaria.

Group B

Mar 25 – Andorra La Vella
Andorra 0
Faroe Islands 0
Att: 1,755. **Ref:** Valjic (Bos)
Andorra: Gomes – Jesus Rubio (M Garcia 46), Llovera, Lima, San Nicolas, Jordi Rubio (Clemente 77), Pujol (A Martinez 54), M Vieira, Vales, C Martinez, Alaez.
Faroe Islands: Nielsen – Naes, V Davidsen, Gregersen, Klettskard, J Davidsen, Bartalsstovu (B Hansen 70), Hansson, Edmundsson, Vatnhamar, Sorensen (P Justinussen 82).
Sent off: Edmundsson 74.

Mar 25 – Lisbon
Portugal 3 (Andre Silva 32, Cristiano Ronaldo 36, 65)
Hungary 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 57,816. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Portugal: Rui Patricio – Cedric, Pepe, Jose Fonte, Raphael Guerreiro, Joao Mario (Joao Moutinho 83), William Carvalho, Andre Gomes (Pizzi 86), Quaresma, Andre Silva (Bernardo Silva 67), Cristiano Ronaldo.
Hungary: Gulacsi – Lang (Lovrencsics 46), Vinicius, Kadar, Korhut, Nagy, Bese, Gyurcso (Kalmar 69), Gera (Pinter 85), Dzsudzsak, Szalai.

Mar 25 – Geneva
Switzerland 1 (Drmic 66)
Latvia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Bezborodov (Rus)
Switzerland: Sommer – Lichtsteiner, Schar, Djourou, Moubandje, G Fernandes (Drmic 64), Xhaka, Shaqiri (Zuber 77), Dzemaili, Mehmedi, Seferovic (Freuler 83).
Latvia: Vanins – Freimanis, Jagodinskis, Gorkss, Solovjovs, A Visnakovs (Gabovs 56), Lazdins (Gutkovskis 77), O Laizans, Kluskins, Sabala, D Ikaunieks (Rakels 69).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland	5	5	0	0	10	3	15
Portugal	5	4	0	1	19	3	12
Hungary	5	2	1	2	8	6	7
Faroe Islands	5	1	2	2	2	8	5
Latvia	5	1	0	4	2	9	3
Andorra	5	0	1	4	1	13	1

Jun 9: Andorra v Hungary; Faroe Islands v Switzerland; Latvia v Portugal.
Aug 31: Hungary v Latvia; Portugal v Faroe Islands; Switzerland v Andorra.
Sep 3: Faroe Islands v Andorra; Hungary v Portugal; Latvia v Switzerland.
Oct 7: Andorra v Portugal; Faroe Islands v Latvia; Switzerland v Hungary.
Oct 10: Hungary v Faroe Islands; Latvia v Andorra; Portugal v Switzerland.

Group C

Mar 26 – Baku
Azerbaijan 1 (Nazarov 31)
Germany 4 (Schurrle 19, 81, Muller 36, Gomez 45)
HT: 1-3. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Azerbaijan: K Agayev – Mirzabekov, B Huseynov, R F Sadygov, Pashayev, Garayev, Amirguliyev (Eddy 87), Ismayilov (R Kurbanov 81), J Huseynov, Nazarov, Sheydaev (Yilmaz 67).
Germany: Leno – Kimmich, Hummels, Howedes, Hector, Khedira, Kroos (Rudy 89), Schurrle, Muller, Draxler (Sane 84), Gomez (Ozil 61).

Mar 26 – Belfast
Northern Ireland 2 (Ward 2, Washington 33)
Norway 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 18,161. **Ref:** Gocek (Tur)
Northern Ireland: McGovern – C McLaughlin, J Evans, McAuley, Cathcart, Davis, Norwood, Ward (McGinn 80), Brunt, Dallas (Lund 88), Washington (K Lafferty 85).
Norway: Jarstein – Skjelvik, Elabdellaoui, Valsvik, Hovland, Johansen (Berge 75), Nordtveit, M Elyounoussi, King, T Elyounoussi (Daehli 53), Soderlund (Diomande 63).

Mar 26 – Serravalle
San Marino 0
Czech Republic 6 (Barak 17, 24, Darida 19, pen 77, Gebre Selassie 26, Krmencik 43)
HT: 0-5. **Att:** 1,023. **Ref:** Tohver (Est)
San Marino: A Simoncini – Palazzi, Cesarini, D Simoncini, F Vitaioli, Rinaldi (Tomassini 62), Zafferani, Cervellini (Battistini 90+1), Domeniconi, M Vitaioli, Stefanelli (Mazza 84).
Czech Republic: Vaclik – Gebre Selassie, Sivok, Brabec, Novak, Dockal, Darida, Krejci, Barak (Horava 76), Jankto (Zmrhal 68), Krmencik (Skoda 68).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	5	5	0	0	20	1	15
N Ireland	5	3	1	1	10	2	10
Czech Rep	5	2	2	1	8	4	8
Azerbaijan	5	2	1	2	3	8	7
Norway	5	1	0	4	5	9	3
San Marino	5	0	0	5	1	23	0

Jun 10: Azerbaijan v Northern Ireland; Germany v San Marino; Norway v Czech Republic.
Sep 1: Czech Republic v Germany; Norway v Azerbaijan; San Marino v Northern Ireland.
Sep 4: Azerbaijan v San Marino; Germany v Norway; Northern Ireland v Czech Republic.
Oct 5: Azerbaijan v Czech Republic; Northern Ireland v Germany; San Marino v Norway.
Oct 8: Czech Republic v San Marino; Germany v Azerbaijan; Norway v Northern Ireland.

Group D

Mar 24 – Vienna
Austria 2 (Arnautovic 75, Harnik 90)
Moldova 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 21,000. **Ref:** Vad (Hun)
Austria: Lindner – Dragovic, Prodl, Hinteregger, Lazaro (Janko 69), Junuzovic, Ilsanker, Alaba, Sabitzer, Burgstaller (Harnik 82), Arnautovic (Suttner 90+3).
Moldova: Namasco – Golovatenco (Racu 80), Posmac, Epureanu, Bolohan (Mihaliov 90), Dedov, Cebotaru, Gatcan, A Antoniuc (Ionita 62), Ginsari, Bugaiov.

Mar 24 – Tbilisi
Georgia 1 (Kacharava 6)
Serbia 3 (Tadic pen 45, A Mitrovic 64, Gacinovic 86)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 31,328. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
Georgia: Loria – Kakabadze (Arabidze 70), Kashia, Kverkvelia, Navalovski, Kvekveskiri, Kazaishvili (Kvilitaia 83), Gvilia (Jigauri 90), Kankava, Ananidze, Kacharava.
Serbia: Stojkovic – Ivanovic, Maksimovic, Kolarov, Rukavina, Milivojevic, Matic, Obradovic (Vukovic 46), Tadic, Kostic (Gacinovic 81), A Mitrovic (Gudelj 71).

Mar 24 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 0
Wales 0
Att: 49,989. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Republic of Ireland: Randolph – Coleman (Christie 72), Keogh, O'Shea, Ward, Walters, Whelan, Meyler (McGeady 79), Hendrick, McClean, Long.
Wales: Hennessey – Gunter, Chester, A Williams, B Davies, Taylor, Ledley (Richards 72), Ramsey, Allen, Bale, Robson-Kanu (Vokes 46).
Sent off: Taylor 69.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	5	3	2	0	12	6	11
Rep Ireland	5	3	2	0	7	3	11
Wales	5	1	4	0	8	4	7
Austria	5	2	1	2	8	7	7
Georgia	5	0	2	3	4	8	2
Moldova	5	0	1	4	2	13	1

Jun 11: Moldova v Georgia; Republic of Ireland v Austria; Serbia v Wales.
Sep 2: Georgia v Republic of Ireland; Serbia v Moldova; Wales v Austria.
Sep 5: Austria v Georgia; Moldova v Wales; Republic of Ireland v Serbia.
Oct 6: Austria v Serbia; Georgia v Wales; Republic of Ireland v Moldova.
Oct 9: Moldova v Austria; Serbia v Georgia; Wales v Republic of Ireland.

Group E

Mar 26 – Yerevan
Armenia 2 (Mkhitaryan 73, Ozbiliz 75)
Kazakhstan 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 11,500. **Ref:** Stavrev (Mac)
Armenia: Beglaryan – T Voskanyan, Haroyan, Andonian, Hayrapetyan, Mkhitaryan, G Malakyan, Pizzelli (Manucharyan 65), K Hovhannisyan, Sarkisov (Ozbiliz 70), Ghazaryan (Barseghyan 5).
Kazakhstan: Loria – Beisebekov, Maliy, Shomko, Tungyshbayev (Muzhikov 79), Kuat (Dmitrenko 82), Tagybergen, Islamkhan (M Baizhanov 87), Suyumbayev, Nuserbayev, Nurgaliyev. *Sent off: Maliy 64.*

Mar 26 – Podgorica
Montenegro 1 (Mugosa 63)
Poland 2 (Lewandowski 40, Piszczek 82)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,439. **Ref:** Kassai (Hun)
Montenegro: M Bozovic – Marusic (Vucinic 90+2), Savic, Sofranac, Stojkovic, Kojasevic (Ivanic 81), Scekic (Djordjevic 86), N Vukcevic, Mugosa, Vesovic, Beciraj.
Poland: Fabianski – Piszczek, Glik, Pazdan, Jedrzejczyk, Blaszczykowski, Maczynski (Cionek 90+2), Linetty (Teodorczyk 78), Zielinski, Grosicki (Peszko 90+6), Lewandowski.

Mar 26 – Cluj-Napoca
Romania 0
Denmark 0
Att: 26,895. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)
Romania: Tatarusanu – Sapunaru, Chiriches, Tosca, Benzar, Marin, Pintilii, Latovlevici (Rotariu 76), Chipciu (Ivan 85), Stanciu, Keseru (Alibec 63).
Denmark: Schmeichel – Kjaer (M Jorgensen 46), A Christensen, Vestergaard, P Ankersen, Kvist, Schone (Braithwaite 69), Delaney, Durmisi, Eriksen, Cornelius.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Poland	5	4	1	0	12	6	13
Montenegro	5	2	1	2	10	6	7
Denmark	5	2	1	2	7	5	7
Romania	5	1	3	1	6	4	6
Armenia	5	2	0	3	6	10	6
Kazakhstan	5	0	2	3	3	13	2

Jun 10: Kazakhstan v Denmark; Montenegro v Armenia; Poland v Romania.
Sep 1: Denmark v Poland; Kazakhstan v Montenegro; Romania v Armenia.
Sep 4: Armenia v Denmark; Montenegro v Romania; Poland v Kazakhstan.
Oct 5: Armenia v Poland; Montenegro v Denmark; Romania v Kazakhstan.
Oct 8: Denmark v Romania; Kazakhstan v Armenia; Poland v Montenegro.

Group F

Mar 26 – London
England 2 (Defoe 22, Vardy 66)
Lithuania 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 77,690. **Ref:** Buquet (Fra)
England: Hart – Walker, Keane, Stones, Bertrand, Dier, Oxlade-Chamberlain, Lallana, Alli, Sterling (Rashford 60), Defoe (Vardy 60).
Lithuania: Setkus – Vaitkunas, Kijanskas, L Klimavicius, Slavickas, Kuklys, Zulpa, Novikovas (Grigaravicius 54), Slivka (Paulius 87), Cernych, Valskis (Matulevicius 74).

Mar 26 – Valletta
Malta 1 (J P Farrugia 14)
Slovakia 3 (Weiss 2, Gregus 41, Nemec 84)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 4,980. **Ref:** Palabiyik (Tur)
Malta: Hogg – Attard, Z Muscat, Magri, Camilleri (Baldacchino 81), Zerafa, Gambin (Kristensen 73), Sciberras, P Fenech, J P Farrugia, Schembri (Montebello 90+1).
Sent off: J P Farrugia 79.
Slovakia: Kozacik – Pekarik, Skrtel, Skriniar, Hubocan, Mak (Hamsik 50), Hrosovsky, Weiss (Rusnak 86), Kucka (Duris 74), Gregus, Nemec.
Sent off: Nemec 90+1.

Mar 26 – Glasgow
Scotland 1 (C Martin 88)
Slovenia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,435. **Ref:** Kuipers (Hol)
Scotland: Gordon – Robertson, R Martin, Mulgrew, Tierney, Morrison (C Martin 82), Brown, Armstrong, Forrest, Snodgrass (Anya 75), Griffiths (Naismith 50).
Slovenia: Oblak – Aljaz Struna, Samardzic, Cesar, Jokic, Kurtic, Krhin, Kampl (Omladic 87), Ilicic, Birsa (Beric 69), Bezjak (Verbic 58).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	5	4	1	0	8	0	13
Slovakia	5	3	0	2	10	3	9
Slovenia	5	2	2	1	4	3	8
Scotland	5	2	1	2	7	8	7
Lithuania	5	1	2	2	5	9	5
Malta	5	0	0	5	2	13	0

Jun 10: Lithuania v Slovakia; Scotland v England; Slovenia v Malta.
Sep 1: Lithuania v Scotland; Malta v England; Slovakia v Slovenia.
Sep 4: England v Slovakia; Scotland v Malta; Slovenia v Lithuania.
Oct 5: England v Slovenia; Malta v Lithuania; Scotland v Slovakia.
Oct 8: Lithuania v England; Slovakia v Malta; Slovenia v Scotland.

Group G

Mar 24 – Palermo
Italy 2 (De Rossi pen 12, Immobile 71)
Albania 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 33,136. **Ref:** Vincic (Sln)
Italy: Buffon – Zappacosta, Barzagli, Bonucci, De Sciglio, Candreva, De Rossi, Verratti, Insigne, Immobile, Belotti.
Albania: Strakosha – Hysaj, Veseli, Ajeti, Agolli, Basha (Latifi 88), Kukeli, Memushaj, Lila (Sadiku 68), Cikalleshi, Roshi (Grezda 78).

Mar 24 – Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
Macedonia 3 (Nikolov 43, Nestorovski 68, 73)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 4,517. **Ref:** Lardot (Blg)
Liechtenstein: Jehle – Rechsteiner (Wolfinger 78), Gubser, Malin, Goppel, Burgmeier, Martin Buchel (A Sele 83), Salanovic (Brandle 87), N Hasler, Y Frick, Marcel Buchel.
Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Ristovski, D Velkoski, Sikov, Ristevski, Trickovski (Babunski 78), Nikolov, Spirovski (Gjorgjev 85), B Ibraimi (Trajkovski 64), Pandev, Nestorovski.

Mar 24 – Gijon
Spain 4 (Silva 13, Vitolo 45+1, Diego Costa 51, Isco 88)
Israel 1 (Refaelov 76)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 20,321. **Ref:** Oliver (Eng)
Spain: De Gea – Carvajal, Sergio Ramos, Pique, Jordi Alba, Busquets, Iniesta (Isco 70), Vitolo (Iago Aspas 83), Thiago (Koke 63), Silva, Diego Costa.
Israel: Marciano – Dasa, Tzedek, Tibi (Tawatha 19), Gershon, Cohen, Einbinder (Keltjens 60), Natcho, Tal Ben Haim/F (Hemed 64), Zahavi, Refaelov.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP G

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	5	4	1	0	19	2	13
Italy	5	4	1	0	13	4	13
Israel	5	3	0	2	9	9	9
Albania	5	2	0	3	4	8	6
Macedonia	5	1	0	4	7	11	3
Liechtenstein	5	0	0	5	1	19	0

Jun 11: Israel v Albania; Italy v Liechtenstein; Macedonia v Spain.
Sep 2: Albania v Liechtenstein; Israel v Macedonia; Spain v Italy.
Sep 5: Italy v Israel; Liechtenstein v Spain; Macedonia v Albania.
Oct 6: Italy v Macedonia; Liechtenstein v Israel; Spain v Albania.
Oct 9: Albania v Italy; Israel v Spain; Macedonia v Liechtenstein.

Group H

Mar 25 – Brussels
Belgium 1 (R Lukaku 89)
Greece 1 (Mitroglou 46)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 42,281. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Belgium: Courtois – Alderweireld, Ciman (Mirallas 84), Vertonghen, Fellaini (Dembele 66), Witsel, Nainggolan, Chadli, Mertens, Carrasco, R Lukaku.
Greece: Kapino – Torosidis, Manolas, Papastathopoulos, Tzavellas, Tachtsidis, Samaris, Mantalos (Zeca 84), Fortounis (Tziolis 67), Stafylidis, Mitroglou (Vellios 90+2).
Sent off: Tachtsidis 65, Tzavellas 90+5.

Mar 25 – Zenica
Bosnia-Herzegovina 5 (Ibisevic 4, 43, Vrsajevic 52, Visca 56, Bicakcic 90+4)
Gibraltar 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 8,285. **Ref:** Edvartsen (Nor)
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic – Bicakcic, Cocalic, Zukanovic, Kolasinac (Pavlovic 46), Vrsajevic (Bajic 75), Pjanic (Vrancic 57), Cimirot, Visca, Hodzic, Ibisevic.
Gibraltar: Ibrahim – K Chipolina (Pusey 53), Payas, R Chipolina, J Chipolina, Garcia, Anthony Hernandez, Walker, Guiling (Bardon 75), K Casciaro (J-P Duarte 87), L Casciaro.

Mar 25 – Nicosia
Cyprus 0
Estonia 0
Att: 3,864. **Ref:** Nevalainen (Fin)
Cyprus: Panayi – Stylianou (Avraam 72), Merkis, Laifis, Charalambous, Artymatas, Kyriakou, Laban (Roushias 82), Christofi, Kastanos, Mytidis (Makris 88).

Estonia: Aksalu – Teniste, Baranov, Klavan, Kruglov, Kait, Aleksandr Dmitrijev, Mets, Ojamaa (Luts 65), Vassiljev (Henri Anier 90+1), Zenjov (Toomet 79).

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP H	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belgium	5	4	1	0	22	2	13
Greece	5	3	2	0	10	3	11
Bosnia-Herz	5	3	1	1	13	5	10
Cyprus	5	1	1	3	3	8	4
Estonia	5	1	1	3	5	15	4
Gibraltar	5	0	0	5	2	22	0

Jun 9: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Greece; Estonia v Belgium; Gibraltar v Cyprus.
Aug 31: Belgium v Gibraltar; Cyprus v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Greece v Estonia.
Sep 3: Estonia v Cyprus; Gibraltar v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Greece v Belgium.
Oct 7: Bosnia-Herzegovina v Belgium; Cyprus v Greece; Gibraltar v Estonia.
Oct 10: Belgium v Cyprus; Estonia v Bosnia-Herzegovina; Greece v Gibraltar.

Group I

Mar 24 – Zagreb
Croatia 1 (N Kalinic 38)
Ukraine 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 27,351. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)
Croatia: Subasic – Jedvaj, Mitrovic, Vida, Pivaric, Modric, Badelj, Brozovic (Rog 90+1), Rakitic (Kovacic 79), Mandzukic, N Kalinic (Kramaric 87).
Ukraine: Pyatov – Butko, Ordets, Kucher, Matviyenko, Rotan (Sydorchuk 77), Stepanenko, Yarmolenko, Kovalenko (Besedin 85), Konoplyanka, Kravets (Seleznyov 59).

Mar 24 – Shkoder, Albania
Kosovo 1 (Nuhiu 52)
Iceland 2 (B Sigurdarson 25, G Sigurdsson pen 35)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 6,832. **Ref:** Dias (Por)
Kosovo: Ujkani – Perdedaj (Avdijaj 74), Rrahmani, Pnishi, Kololli, Shala, Kryeziu, Rashica (Celina 64), Besart Berisha (Bernard Berisha 83), V Berisha, Nuhiu.
Iceland: Halldorsson – B Saevarsson, Arnason, R Sigurdsson, A Skulason, Traustason (R Gislason 72), A Gunnarsson, G Sigurdsson, Hallfredsson, B Sigurdarson (O Skulason 86), Kjartansson (J Bodvarsson 69).

Mar 24 – Antalya
Turkey 2 (Tosun 9, 13)
Finland 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 28,990. **Ref:** Gil Manzano (Spa)
Turkey: Volkan Babacan – Gokhan Gonul, Toprak, Mehmet Topal, Ismail, Selcuk Inan, Arda, Volkan Sen, Malli (Okay 63), Sahan (Mor 72), Tosun (Enes 84).
Finland: Hradecky – Arkivuo, Arajuuri, N Moisander, Uronen, Lod, Mattila (Yaghoubi 67), Ring (Forsell 84), P Hetemaj, Pohjanpalo (Markkanen 72), Pukki.

WC QUALS – EUROPE – GROUP I	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Croatia	5	4	1	0	11	1	13
Iceland	5	3	1	1	8	6	10
Ukraine	5	2	2	1	7	4	8
Turkey	5	2	2	1	7	5	8
Finland	5	0	1	4	3	8	1
Kosovo	5	0	1	4	2	14	1

Jun 11: Finland v Ukraine; Iceland v Croatia; Kosovo v Turkey.
Sep 2: Croatia v Kosovo; Finland v Iceland; Ukraine v Turkey.
Sep 5: Iceland v Ukraine; Kosovo v Finland; Turkey v Croatia.
Oct 6: Croatia v Finland; Kosovo v Ukraine; Turkey v Iceland.
Oct 9: Finland v Turkey; Iceland v Kosovo; Ukraine v Croatia.

Each team will play10 games (5x2)

● *The 9 group winners will qualify for the finals; the 8 runners-up with the best record (against the countries finishing1st, 3rd, 4th & 5th in the respective groups) will be paired in 4 play-offs, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals*

OCEANIA section

● *0.5 finals places available*

3rd round

Group A

Mar 25 – Lautoka
Fiji 0
New Zealand 2 (Wood pen 48, Rojas 55)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 7,000. **Ref:** Hauata (Tah)
Fiji: Mateinaqara – Rawaqa, Radrigai (Prasad 74), Saukuru, Hughes, R Krishna, Tekiate (Vesikula 71), Vakatalesau (Hoyt 62), Drova, Sivoki, Waqa.
New Zealand: Marinovic – Wynne, Tzimopoulos (Smith 88), Boxall, Tuiloma (Thomas 68), McGlinchey, Wood, Rojas, Lewis (Smeltz 78), Colvey, Durante.

Mar 28 – Wellington
New Zealand 2 (Thomas 27, 68)
Fiji 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 10,133. **Ref:** Zitouni (Tah)
New Zealand: Marinovic – Boxall, D Ingham, McGlinchey, Smeltz (Dyer 90+1), Rojas, Thomas (Rufer 84), Lewis (J Ingham 61), Doyle, Smith, Durante.
Fiji: Mateinaqara – Suwamy (Drova 57), Radrigai, Saukuru, Hughes, R Krishna, Tekiate, Prasad (Tuilau 40), Vakatalesau (Drudru 72), Sivoki, Waqa.

WC QUALS – OCEANIA – 3RD ROUND: GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N Zealand (Q)	4	3	1	0	6	0	10
New Caledonia	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Fiji	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Jun 7: Fiji v New Caledonia.
Jun 11: New Caledonia v Fiji.

Group B

Mar 23 – Port Moresby
Papua New Guinea 1 (Dabinyaba 45+1)
Tahiti 3 (Graglia 59, 85, T Tehau 90+3)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,209. **Ref:** Chand (Fij)
Papua New Guinea: Warisan (K Komolong 90+7) – A Komolong, F Komolong, Aisa (Alois 60), Foster, Dabinyaba, Browne, E Simon, Steven (Redenut 61), Sabua, Willis. *Sent off: Browne 22.*
Tahiti: Roche – Tiatia (Amau 30), Paama, Tevaerai (Warren 59), Porlier, T Tehau, Graglia, Tehina (Roo 75), Bourebare, Tetauira, A Tehau.

Mar 28 – Papeete
Tahiti 1 (Keck 90+3)
Papua New Guinea 2 (Aisa 62, Gunemba 74)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Conger (NZ)
Tahiti: Roche – Paama, Tevaerai (Tissot 74), Amau, Porlier (Keck 60), T Tehau, Graglia, Warren, Bourebare, Tetauira, L Tehau (J Tehau 46).
Papua New Guinea: Warisan – Redenut, Alois (Aisa 46), A Komolong, F Komolong, Gunemba (Kini 90+2), Foster, Dabinyaba, E Simon, Sabua, Willis.

WC QUALS – OCEANIA – 3RD ROUND: GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tahiti	4	2	0	2	7	4	6
Papua NG	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Solomon Is	2	1	0	1	1	3	3

Jun 9: Solomon Islands v Papua New Guinea.
Jun 13: Papua New Guinea v Solomon Islands.

Each team will play 4 games (2x2)

● *The 2 group winners will meet in the* **Oceania section play-off**, *the winner of which will meet the 5th-placed South American country in a play-off for a place in the finals*

SOUTH AMERICA section

● *4.5 finals places available*

Mar 23 – Buenos Aires
Argentina 1 (Messi pen 16)
Chile 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ricci (Bra)
Argentina: Romero – Mercado (Roncaglia 77), Otamendi, Rojo, Mas (Musacchio 46), Biglia, Mascherano, Messi, Aguero (Banega 58), Di Maria, Higuain.
Chile: Bravo – Isla, G Medel, G Jara, Beausejour, Silva (Valdivia 70), Aranguiz (Paredes 90), Hernandez, Fuenzalida (Castillo 55), Sanchez, Vargas.

Mar 23 – Barranquilla
Colombia 1 (Rodriguez 83)
Bolivia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Marques (Bra)
Colombia: Ospina – Cuadrado, C Zapata, Mina, Armero, M Torres, Uribe (D Zapata 64), C Sanchez, Rodriguez, Bacca (Cardona 76), Muriel (Quinones 34).
Bolivia: Lampe – Cuellar (Ribera 76), Raldes, Coimbra (Gutierrez 90+3), Aponte, Melean, Danny Bejarano, Justiniano, O Morales (Arce 87), Martins Moreno, Sagredo.

Mar 23 – Asuncion
Paraguay 2 (B Valdez 12, Alonso 65)
Ecuador 1 (F Caicedo pen 70)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Argote (Ven)
Paraguay: A Silva – Veron, B Valdez, Da Silva, Alonso, Iturbe (Perez 70), V Caceres (R Ortiz 82), C Riveros, Almiron, Dominguez, Lezcano (Santander 63).
Ecuador: Dreer – Paredes (Montero 87), A Mina, L Caicedo, W Ayovi, A Valencia, Noboa (Mena 88), M Bolanos, Orejuela (Oyola 77), E Valencia, F Caicedo.

Mar 23 – Montevideo
Uruguay 1 (Cavani pen 9)
Brazil 4 (Paulinho 18, 51, 90+2, Neymar 74)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Loustau (Arg)
Uruguay: M Silva – M Pereira, Coates, Godin, G Silva, Arevalo, Vecino, Sanchez (Hernandez 77), C Rodriguez, Rolan (Stuani 58), Cavani.
Brazil: Alisson – Daniel Alves, Marquinhos, Miranda, Marcelo, Casemiro, Philippe Coutinho (Willian 86), Paulinho, Renato Augusto (Fernandinho 81), Neymar, Roberto Firmino (Diego Souza 89).

Mar 23 – Maturin
Venezuela 2 (Villanueva 24, Otero 40)
Peru 2 (Carrillo 46, Guerrero 64)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Caceres (Par)
Venezuela: Farinez – A Gonzalez, Angel, Villanueva, R Feltscher, Murillo (Soteldo 84), Rincon, Martinez (Herrera 59), Guerra, Otero (Machis 73), S Rondon.
Peru: Gallese – Corzo, Ramos, Rodriguez, Trauco, Tapia (Aquino 85), Yotun (Pena 78), Carrillo (Ruidiaz 78), Cueva, Flores, Guerrero.

Mar 28 – La Paz
Bolivia 2 (Arce 31, Marcelo Martins 53)
Argentina 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Bolivia: Lampe – Diego Bejarano, Raldes, Zenteno, J Flores, Wayar (Campos 85), Castro, Chumacero, Escobar, Arce (Justiniano 73), Marcelo Martins (Miranda 90+3).
Argentina: Romero – Roncaglia, Musacchio, Funes Mori (Caruzzo 36), Rojo, Perez (Acuna 70), Pizarro, Banega, Di Maria, Correa (Aguero 56), Pratto.

Mar 28 – Sao Paulo
Brazil 3 (Philippe Coutinho 35, Neymar 64, Marcelo 86)
Paraguay 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)
Brazil: Alisson – Fagner, Miranda, Marquinhos (Thiago Silva 46), Marcelo, Casemiro, Paulinho, Renato Augusto, Philippe Coutinho (Willian 87), Roberto Firmino (Diego Souza 87), Neymar.
Paraguay: A Silva – Veron, B Valdez, Da Silva, Alonso, C Riveros, Rojas, Perez, Almiron (O Romero 46), Gonzalez (Santander 56), Dominguez (A Romero 77).

Mar 28 – Santiago
Chile 3 (Sanchez 4, Paredes 7, 23)
Venezuela 1 (S Rondon 62)
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)
Chile: Bravo – Isla (P Diaz 88), G Medel, G Jara, Beausejour, Aranguiz, Hernandez (Carmona 88), Vidal, Sanchez, Paredes (Valdivia 55), Vargas.
Venezuela: Farinez – R Feltscher, Villanueva, Angel, A Gonzalez (Garcia 60), Rincon (Figuera 84), Zambrano, Machis (Penaranda 66), Otero, Murillo, S Rondon.

Mar 28 – Quito
Ecuador 0
Colombia 2 (Rodriguez 20, Cuadrado 34)
HT: 0-2. **Ref:** Pitana (Arg)
Ecuador: Dreer – Pineida, A Mina, L Caicedo, W Ayovi, Orejuela, Oyola (Achilier 65), A Valencia, Mena (M Caicedo 58), E Valencia (Cortes 58), F Caicedo. *Sent off: L Caicedo 61.*
Colombia: Ospina – Arias (Bacca 82), Mina, C Zapata, Diaz, C Sanchez, Aguilar (D Torres 65), Cardona (Uribe 73), Cuadrado, Rodriguez, Borja.

Mar 28 – Lima
Peru 2 (Guerrero 35, Flores 62)
Uruguay 1 (Sanchez 30)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Bascunan (Chl)
Peru: Gallese – Trauco, Corzo, Rodriguez, Araujo, Tapia, Yotun, Cueva (Hurtado 44), Carrillo (Polo 83), Flores (Aquino 90+1), Guerrero.
Uruguay: Muslera – M Pereira, Gimenez, Godin, Fucile, Sanchez (Urretaviscaya 64), A Gonzalez, Vecino, C Rodriguez (De Arrascaeta 73), Suarez, Cavani. *Sent off: Urretaviscaya 76.*

WC QUALS – SOUTH AMERICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil (QF)	14	10	3	1	35	10	33
Colombia	14	7	3	4	18	15	24
Uruguay	14	7	2	5	26	17	23
Chile	14	7	2	5	24	19	23
Argentina	14	6	4	4	15	14	22
Ecuador	14	6	2	6	23	20	20
Peru	14	5	3	6	22	23	18
Paraguay	14	5	3	6	13	21	18
Bolivia	14	3	1	10	12	32	10
Venezuela	14	1	3	10	17	34	6

Aug 31: Brazil v Ecuador; Chile v Paraguay; Peru v Bolivia; Uruguay v Argentina; Venezuela v Colombia.
Sep 5: Argentina v Venezuela; Bolivia v Chile; Colombia v Brazil; Ecuador v Peru; Paraguay v Uruguay.
Oct 5: Argentina v Peru; Bolivia v Brazil; Chile v Ecuador; Colombia v Paraguay; Venezuela v Uruguay.
Oct 10: Brazil v Chile; Ecuador v Argentina; Paraguay v Venezuela; Peru v Colombia; Uruguay v Bolivia.

Each team will play18 games (9x2)

● *The top 4 will qualify for the finals; the 5th-placed country will meet the winner of the Oceania section play-off in a play-off for a place in the finals*

AFRICA section

● *5 finals places available*

3rd round

Group A

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
DR Congo	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Tunisia	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Guinea	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Libya	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Aug 28: Guinea v Libya; Tunisia v DR Congo.
Sep 2: DR Congo v Tunisia; Libya v Guinea.
Oct 2: Guinea v Tunisia; Libya v DR Congo.
Nov 6: DR Congo v Guinea; Tunisia v Libya.

Group B

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
Cameroon	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Zambia	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Algeria	2	0	1	1	2	4	1

Aug 28: Nigeria v Cameroon; Zambia v Algeria.
Sep 2: Algeria v Zambia; Cameroon v Nigeria.
Oct 2: Cameroon v Algeria; Nigeria v Zambia.
Nov 6: Algeria v Nigeria; Zambia v Cameroon.

Group C

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Gabon	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Morocco	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Mali	2	0	1	1	1	3	1

Aug 28: Gabon v Ivory Coast; Morocco v Mali.
Sep 2: Ivory Coast v Gabon; Mali v Morocco.
Oct 2: Mali v Ivory Coast; Morocco v Gabon.
Nov 6: Gabon v Mali; Ivory Coast v Morocco.

Group D

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
South Africa	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Senegal	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Cape Verde Is	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

Aug 28: Cape Verde Islands v South Africa; Senegal v Burkina Faso.
Sep 2: Burkina Faso v Senegal; South Africa v Cape Verde Islands.
Oct 2: Cape Verde Islands v Senegal; South Africa v Burkina Faso.
Nov 6: Burkina Faso v Cape Verde Islands; Senegal v South Africa.

Group E

WC QUALS – AFRICA – 3RD ROUND: GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Uganda	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Ghana	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Congo	2	0	0	2	1	3	0

Aug 28: Ghana v Congo; Uganda v Egypt.
Sep 2: Congo v Ghana; Egypt v Uganda.
Oct 2: Egypt v Congo; Uganda v Ghana.
Nov 6: Congo v Uganda; Ghana v Egypt.

Each team will play 6 games (3x2)

● *The 5 group winners will qualify for the finals*

2017 CONCACAF GOLD CUP QUALS

Play-off match

1st leg

Mar 24 – Port-au-Prince
Haiti 3 (J Louis 19, 55, Guerrier 41)
Nicaragua 1 (Chavarria 86)
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Fischer (Can)
Haiti: Ceus – Goreux, Genevois, Jerome, Christian, Thuriere, Lafrance (Hilaire 73), J Louis (Herold 80), Guerrier (Norde 70), Belfort, Nazon.
Nicaragua: D Tellez – Quijano, Copete, Casco, Rosas, M Lopez, L Peralta (Pavon 46), Cadena, B Garcia (Galeano 63), Chavarria, Barrera.

2nd leg

Mar 28 – Managua
Nicaragua 3 (Barrera pen 82, 86, 88)
Haiti 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Rojas (Mex)
Nicaragua 4-3 on agg
Nicaragua: D Tellez – Rosas, Quijano (Errington 69), L F Copete, Casco, M Lopez, Cadena, Chavarria, Pavon (B Garcia 78), Galeano (J Garcia 65), Barrera. *Sent off: Barrera 90+3.*
Haiti: Ceus – Jerome, Genevois, Guerrier, Goreux, Lafrance, Thuriere, Christian, Belfort (Etienne 55), J Louis (Hilaire 81), Nazon.

● *Nicaragua have qualified for the Gold Cup finals*

2019 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

3rd round

Group A

Mar 28 – Bishkek
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Baymatov 71)
Macau 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,600. **Ref:** Tufayelieh (Syr)

Mar 28 – Yangon
Myanmar 0
India 1 (Chhetri 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 21,025. **Ref:** Yu (Tai)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – 3RD ROUND: GP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
India	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Kyrgyzstan	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Macau	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Myanmar	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

Group B

Mar 28 – Beirut
Lebanon 2 (Ghaddar 27, Maatouk 34)
Hong Kong 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 14,672. **Ref:** Pranjal (Ind)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – 3RD ROUND: GP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lebanon	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Malaysia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Korea	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hong Kong	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

Group C

Mar 28 – Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Afghanistan 1 (Amin 69)
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Van Toan 64)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Al Khudhayr (Sau)

Mar 28 – Amman
Jordan 7 (H Al Dardour 12, 21, 87, Al Bakhit 46, Al Saify 60, Samir 62, Al Taamari 90)
Cambodia 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Mashentsev (Kyr)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – 3RD ROUND: GP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jordan	1	1	0	0	7	0	3
Vietnam	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Afghanistan	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Cambodia	1	0	0	1	0	7	0

Group D

Mar 28 – Male
Maldives 0
Palestine 3 (Maher 62, 65, Abu Nahyeh 90+2)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Asimov (Uzb)

Mar 28 – Muscat
Oman 14 (Al Muqbali 2, 36, 41, 43, 69, 86, Mubarak 26, Al Khaldi 31, Mabrook 45, Basnet og 55, Al Hajri 70, 77, pen 90+1, 90+2)
Bhutan 0
HT: 7-0. **Att:** 4,500. **Ref:** Abou (Leb)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – 3RD ROUND: GP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oman	1	1	0	0	14	0	3
Palestine	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Maldives	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Bhutan	1	0	0	1	0	14	0

Group E

Mar 26 – Taipei
Taiwan 1 (Chen Po-liang pen 45+3)
Turkmenistan 3 (Annadurdyyev 23, Mingazov 24, Chen Chia-chun og 83)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 5,898. **Ref:** Kim Hee-gon (SKo)
Sent off: Mingazov (Turkmenistan) 90+3

Mar 28 – Manama
Bahrain 0
Singapore 0
Att: 225. **Ref:** Gamini (Sri)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – 3RD ROUND: GP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkmenistan	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Singapore	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Bahrain	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Taiwan	1	0	0	1	1	3	0

Group F

Mar 28 – Manila
Philippines 4 (P Younghusband pen 21, 23, Ramsay 27, Patino 72)
Nepal 1 (B Rai 45+1)
HT: 3-1. **Att:** 1,715. **Ref:** Abdul Baki (Oma)
Sent off: B Lama (Nepal)13

Mar 28 – Doha, Qatar
Yemen 2 (Davron Ergashev og 41, Al Sasi 63)
Tajikistan 1 (Umarbayev 9)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 380. **Ref:** Noor (Mly)

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS – 3RD ROUND: GP F	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Philippines	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Yemen	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Tajikistan	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Nepal	1	0	0	1	1	4	0

Remaining matchdays: *2017 – Jun13, Sep 5, Oct10, Nov14; 2018 – Mar 27*

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the 24-team finals, which will be played in the United Arab Emirates.12 teams have already qualified: Australia, China, Iran, Iraq,Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Syria, Thailand, UAE (hosts) and Uzbekistan*

2019 AFRICAN NATIONS CUP QUALS

Preliminary round

1st legs

Mar 22 – Djibouti
Djibouti 2 (Hamza 56, Breik 65)
South Sudan 0
HT: 0-0

Mar 22 – Sao Tome
Sao Tome e Principe 0
Madagascar 1 (Jordao Diogo og 68)
HT: 0-0

Mar 24 – Mitsamiouli
Comoros 2 (Youssouf 65, Alhadhur 80)
Mauritius 0
HT: 0-0

2nd legs

Mar 26 – Antananarivo
Madagascar 3 (Voavy 2, 17, Andriamahitsinoro 81)
Sao Tome e Principe 2 (Harramiz 28, Ze 84)
HT: 2-1
Madagascar 4-2 on agg

Mar 28 – Belle Vue
Mauritius 1 (St Martin 45+2)
Comoros 1 (Ben Nabouhane 13)
HT: 1-1
Comoros 3-1 on agg

Mar 28 – Juba
South Sudan 6 (Duku 11, Moga 21, 27, Abui 44, Thomas 62, Leon 78)
Djibouti 0
HT: 4-0
South Sudan 6-2 on agg

● *The winners enter the qualifying group stage*

FRIENDLIES

Thursday, March 9

Mar 9 – Doha
Qatar 1 (Assadalla 55)
Azerbaijan 2 (Guliyev 52, Abdullayev 62)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Karako (Hun)
Qatar: Al Sheeb – I Majid, Khoukhi, Pedro Miguel, Y Abubakar, Tabata (Kheder 68), El Sayed (Assadalla 36), Luiz Martin (Musa 46), Al Haidos (I Mohammad 77), Soria (Almoez Ali 63), Akram Afif (Alaaeldin 71).
Azerbaijan: S Agayev – R F Sadygov (Guliyev 46), B Huseynov, J Huseynov (E Mammadov 81), Amirguliyev, Garayev, Mirzabekov, Alaskarov (Abdullayev 46), Mutallimov (Abbasov 68), R Kurbanov (Aliyev 46), Ramazanov (Madatov 68).

Friday, March 10

Mar10 – Couva
Trinidad & Tobago 2 (Boatswain 37, 45+1)
Barbados 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Sobers (T&T)
Trinidad & Tobago: Phillip – A Jones, Cyrus (Perez 51), Gonzales, Hodge, London (Paul 46), Hector, D Mitchell (Francois 83), Arcia (Cummings 71), De Silva (C Edwards 76), Perry (Boatswain 33; Roach 62).
Barbados: Weir (Primus 75) – Browne, Bailey, Highland, Chapman (Hill 75), M Williams (Hoyte 75), Leacock (Sargeant 46), Holligan (King 78), Boyce (Harris 46), R Harewood (Lashley 65), Lawrence.

Saturday, March 11

Mar11 – Bujumbura
Burundi 7 (Ntirwaza 30, Ndarusanze 33, 48, T Ndikumana 35, 86, Duhayindavyi 50, Bimenyimana 73)
Djibouti 0
HT: 3-0

Monday, March 13

Mar13 – Bujumbura
Burundi 1 (Barirengako 15)
Djibouti 0
HT: 1-0

Thursday, March 16

Mar16 – San Pedro Sula
Honduras 2 (Discua 11, Andino 71)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Hnd)
Honduras: Escober (L Lopez 46) – Izaguirre, Crisanto, Vargas, H Figueroa (Chirinos 46), Alvarado (Oseguera 46), Discua (Morazan 46), M Martinez (Acosta 46), Andino, Claros, Castillo (Hernandez 46).
Nicaragua: D Tellez – Casco, Rosas, O Lopez (E Tellez 46), Quijano (Veliz 46), J Garcia, B Garcia (Errington 46), M Lopez, L Peralta (J Coronel 46), Chavarria (L F Coronel 46), Galeano (Smith 46).

Saturday, March 18

Mar18 – Tehran
Iran 0
Iraq 1 (Abdul-Amir pen 72)
HT: 0-0. *Played behind closed doors*
Iraq: J Hassan – Bahjat, Ibrahim, Sulaka, Mhawi (Salem 46), Kalaf, Abdul-Amir, Attwan, Adnan (Resan 46), Abdul-Raheem (Ahmad 46), Abdul-Zahra (Yasin 46).

Sunday, March 19

Mar19 – Serravalle
San Marino 0
Moldova 2 (Posmac 26, Gatcan 72)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Valeri (Ita)
San Marino: A Simoncini (Benedettini 46) – Palazzi, Cesarini, D Simoncini, Brolli, Valentini (Rinaldi 46), Domeniconi (Berretti 83), Cervellini, Tosi (Battistini 46), Tomassini (E Golinucci 80), Hirsch (Bernardi 67).
Moldova: Koselev – Racu (Jardan 66), Golovatenco, Bolohan (Potirniche 84), Posmac, Cojocari, Gatcan (Mihaliov 76), Ginsari, Dedov (Ivanov 83), A Antoniuc (Sidorenco 46), Bugaiov (Andronic 76).

Tuesday, March 21

Mar 21 – Cibinong
Indonesia 1 (Hardianto 22)
Myanmar 3 (Maung Maung Lwin 37, Kyaw Ko Ko pen 74, Si Thu Aung 90+2)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 13,150

Wednesday, March 22

Mar 22 – Phnom Penh
Cambodia 2 (Laboravy 37, Vathanaka 62)
India 3 (Chhetri 36, Lalpekhlua 50, Jhingan 54)
HT: 1-1

Mar 22 – Willemstad
Curacao 1 (Zschusschen 70)
El Salvador 1 (Zelaya 90+2)
HT: 0-0

Mar 22 – Larnaca
Cyprus 3 (Mytidis 55, Katelaris 63, Christofi 67)
Kazakhstan 1 (Nuserbayev 29)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Harvey (RoI)
Cyprus: Panayi – Stylianou (Panayiotou 77), Sielis, Alexandrou, Katelaris, Laban (Margaca 58), Kastanos (Avraam 68), Artymatas, Charalambides (Christofi 58), Makris (Roushias 81), Mytidis (Kyriakou 68).
Kazakhstan: Pokatilov – Shomko, Maliy, Beisebekov, Suyumbayev, Nurgaliyev (Murtazayev 89), Kuat (Schetkin 72), Islamkhan (Zhukov 64), Tagybergen, Tungyshbayev (Miroshnichenko 67), Nuserbayev (Sartakov 90).

Mar 22 – Usti Nad Labem
Czech Republic 3 (Horava pen 48, Jankto 65, Krmencik 79)
Lithuania 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,959. **Ref:** Bieri (Swi)
Czech Republic: Vaclik (Koubek 46) – Gebre Selassie (Celustka 46), Sivok (Kalas 46), Brabec (Suchy 46), Novak (Hlousek 46), Darida (Husbauer 46), Barak (Mares 46), Krejci (Sykora 46), Dockal (Horava 46), Zmrhal (Jankto 46), Skoda (Krmencik 46).
Lithuania: Setkus (Zubas 46) – Vaitkunas (Borovskij 46), A Klimavicius (Mikuckis 61), L Klimavicius (Kijanskas 61), Slavickas (Baravykas 46), Luksa (Cernych 61), Kuklys (Verbickas 46), Paulius (Zulpa 61), Slivka (Eliosius 61), Grigaravicius (Novikovas 61), Matulevicius (Valskis 61).

Mar 22 – Dortmund
Germany 1 (Podolski 69)
England 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 60,109. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)
Germany: Ter Stegen – Kimmich, Rudiger, Hummels, Hector, Weigl (Can 66), Kroos, Brandt (Schurrle 59), Podolski (Rudy 84), Sane, Werner (Muller 77).
England: Hart – Keane, Smalling (Stones 84), Cahill, Walker, Livermore (Ward-Prowse 83), Dier, Bertrand (Shaw 83), Lallana (Redmond 66), Alli (Lingard 71), Vardy (Rashford 71).

Mar 22 – Manila
Philippines 0
Malaysia 0

Mar 22 – Edinburgh
Scotland 1 (Naismith 35)
Canada 1 (Aird 11)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 9,158. **Ref:** Kehlet (Den)
Scotland: McGregor – Anya, Wallace (Robertson 46), Berra, Mulgrew, D Fletcher, Cairney (McGinn 75), Burke (Bannan 46), Snodgrass, Naismith (Rhodes 61), C Martin (Griffiths 61).
Canada: Thomas (Leutwiler 46) – Ledgerwood, Straith, James, Tissot (Corbin-Ong 67), Arfield (Trafford 90+4), Piette, Aird, Bustos, Hoilett, Jackson (Fisk 76).

World Service

Mar 22 - Hanoi
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Cong Phuong 87)
Taiwan 1 (Lee Pin-hsien 84)
HT: 0-0

Mar 22 - Doha, Qatar
Yemen 0
Palestine 1 (Pinto 85)
HT: 0-0

Thursday, March 23

Mar 23 - Doha, Qatar
Afghanistan 2 (Mukhammad 4, Azadzoy 58)
Singapore 1 (Shawal 47)
HT: 1-0

Mar 23 - Riffa
Bahrain 1 (Al Aswad 90+3)
Tajikistan 1 (M Dzhalilov 3)
HT: 0-1

Mar 23 - Amman
Jordan 4 (Al Bakhit 13, H Al Dardour 44, Al Taamari 61, Al Bawab 82)
Hong Kong 0
HT: 2-0

Mar 23 - Machakos
Kenya 1 (Olunga 34)
Uganda 1 (Waiswa 88)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Ogwayo (Ken)

Mar 23 - London, England
Nigeria 1 (Iheanacho pen 83)
Senegal 1 (Sow 54)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,013. **Ref:** Taylor (Eng)
Nigeria: Akpeyi - Omeruo, Troost-Ekong, Balogun, Echiejile, Musa (Kayode 75), Onazi (Ogu 25), Ndidi, Simon (Success 60), Iwobi (Etebo 60), Iheanacho.
Senegal: P S N'Diaye - Wague, Kouyate, Koulibaly, A Mbengue (C Mbengue 74), S Sane, M B Diouf, C N'Doye, Gueye, Nguette (Mane 64), Sow (Diedhiou 68).

Friday, March 24

Mar 24 - Le Havre, France
Guinea 2 (Kamano 30, Issiaga Sylla 86)
Gabon 2 (Bouanga 44, D Ndong 89)
HT: 1-1

Mar 24 - Alexandria, Egypt
Libya 0
Togo 0

Mar 24 - Nouakchott
Mauritania 1 (Ahmed pen 90)
Benin 0
HT: 0-0

Mar 24 - Marrakech
Morocco 2 (Fajr 35, Bouhaddouz 64)
Burkina Faso 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Essrayri (Tun)
Morocco: El Kajoui - Dirar, El Yamiq, Saiss, Mendyl (Nahiri 73), El Ahmadi, Boussoufa, Belhanda (Boutaib 79), Fajr (Azaro 88), En-Nesyri (Boufal 52), Bouhaddouz (Bammou 65).
Burkina Faso: Diakite - Dayo, Yago (Paro 79), Ouedraogo, P Kabore (Malo 61), Coulibaly (Nakoulma 46), Guira (Sare 46), Abdou Traore, Toure (Aziz Ki 61), B Traore, Diawara (Koura 46).

Mar 24 - Krasnodar
Russia 0
Ivory Coast 2 (Kodjia 30, Zaha 70)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 26,000. **Ref:** Rolea (Rom)
Russia: Akinfeev - Semenov, Kutepov, Kudryashov, Samedov, Zobnin, Golovin (Gazinsky 78), Zhirkov (D Kombarov 71), Erokhin, Poloz (Miranchuk 80), Bukharov (Kanunnikov 76).
Ivory Coast: Gbohouo - Bagayoko, Bailly, Deli, Kanon, Serey Die, Sio, Kessie, Doukoure, Zaha, Kodjia (Pepe 89).

Mar 24 - Monastir
Tunisia 0
Cameroon 1 (Aboubakar 15)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 6,000. **Ref:** Lemghaifry (Mra)
Tunisia: A Mathlouthi - Mbarki, Maaloul, Abdennour (Yacoubi 60), S Ben Youssef, Azouni, Ben Amor, Laribi (Lahmar 67), Sliti, Akaichi (Younes 76), Khenissi (F Ben Youssef 83).
Cameroon: Ondoa - Fai (Mabouka 77), Teikeu (Djetei 63), Ngadeu, Oyongo, Djoum (Mandjeck 63), Zambo Anguissa, Bassogog (Toko Ekambi 46), Zoua (Choupo-Moting 46), Moukandjo, Aboubakar (Ngamaleu 78).

Saturday, March 25

Mar 25 - Maputo
Mozambique 2 (Clesio 56, Herenilson og 72)
Angola 0
HT: 0-0

Mar 25 - Durban
South Africa 3 (Erasmus pen 35, Tau 69, Jali pen 89)
Guinea-Bissau 1 (Aldair 78)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 11,074. **Ref:** Sikazwe (Zam)
South Africa: Khune - Mphahlele, Hlatshwayo, Mathoho, Langerman, Mokotjo (Manyama 65), Furman, Dolly (Mnyamane 80), T Zwane (Jali 58; Mabunda 90+4), Serero (Kekana 81), Erasmus (Tau 65).

Mar 25 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 2 (Samatta 3, 87)
Botswana 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,983

Sunday, March 26

Mar 26 - Cave Hill
Barbados 2 (Jules 61, 68)
Martinique 1 (Abaul 85)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Gaymes (StV)
Sent off: Faubert (Martinique) 40

Mar 26 - Machakos
Kenya 2 (Olunga 5, 70)
DR Congo 1 (Kakuta 60)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Omweno (Ken)

Mar 26 - Harare
Zimbabwe 0
Zambia 0

Monday, March 27

Mar 27 - Rabat, Morocco
Central African Republic 1 (Mafouta pen 29)
Gambia 2 (Barrow 26, Carayol 68)
HT: 1-1

Mar 27 - Paris, France
Ivory Coast 1 (Cyriac 70)
Senegal 1 (Mane pen 68)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Chapron (Fra)
Match abandoned in the 88th minute after fans invaded the pitch
Ivory Coast: Gbohouo - Kanon, Bailly, Deli, Bagayoko, Kessie, Serey Die (Sanogo 74), Doukoure, Pepe, Zaha (Assale 58), Sio (Cyriac 58).
Senegal: Diallo - Gassama, Mbodj, Toure (S Sane 64), Ciss, Gueye (Babacar 46), Saivet, A N'Diaye, Mane, Diedhiou (Nguette 46), Keita (C N'Doye 74).

Mar 27 - Nouakchott
Mauritania 2 (El Id 40, Soudani 60)
Congo 1 (D Diarra og 30)
HT: 1-1

Mar 27 - Eskisehir
Turkey 3 (Mor 14, Ahmet Calik 24, Cengiz 52)
Moldova 1 (Ginsari 90+1)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Nuza (Kos)
Turkey: Onur (Harun 46) - Sener, Ahmet Calik, Caglar, Guray, Ozyakup (Turuc 64), Okay, Mor (Malli 83), Emre Colak (Ayhan 69), Cengiz (Tosun 83), Enes (Gurler 76).
Moldova: Pascenco - Racu (Posmac 46), Golovatenco, Epureanu, Bolohan, Dedov, Cebotaru, Cojocari, Mihaliov (A Antoniuc 46), Ginsari, Bugaiov (Sidorenco 56).

Tuesday, March 28

Mar 28 - Elbasan
Albania 1 (Balaj 68)
Bosnia-Herzegovina 2 (Dzeko pen 7, Lulic 42)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 4,550. **Ref:** Meckarovski (Mac)
Albania: Strakosha (Hoxha 46) - Hysaj, Veseli, Alla (Ajeti 46), Aliji, Basha, Kukeli, Llullaku (Cikalleshi 78), Memushaj (Roshi 59), Hyka (Latifi 70), Balaj.
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Begovic - O Vranjes (Stevanovic 40), Zukanovic, Sunjic, Dumic, Lulic (Duljevic 68), Prcic (Cimirot 46), Jajalo (Vrancic 71), Krunic, Kodro (Pavlovic 78), Dzeko (Bajic 59).

Mar 28 - Innsbruck
Austria 1 (Arnautovic 62)
Finland 1 (Jensen 76)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 13,700. **Ref:** Zelinka (CzR)
Austria: Lindner - Prodl, Hinteregger, Dragovic, Lazaro, Junuzovic (Ilsanker 81), Suttner (Lainer 46), Schopf (Gregoritsch 72), Alaba (Grillitsch 46), Sabitzer (Janko 46), Harnik (Arnautovic 46).
Finland: Hradecky - Raitala, Arajuuri (Sauli Vaisanen 46), N Moisander, Toivio, Uronen (Arkivuo 46), Saksela (Jensen 58), Lam, Yaghoubi (Mattila 65), P Hetemaj, Pukki (Pohjanpalo 58).

Mar 28 - Molenbeek, Belgium
Cameroon 1 (Toko Ekambi 31)
Guinea 2 (A D Camara 21, Kamano 45+1)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 3,500. **Ref:** Lardot (Blg)
Cameroon: Goda - Ngadeu, Djetei, Mabouka, Leuko, Mandjeck (Zambo Anguissa 65), Boya (Djoum 73), Toko Ekambi (Moukandjo 65), Bassogog, Ngamaleu (Aboubakar 73), Zoua.
Guinea: A Sylla (Abdul Keita 82) - Alseny Bangoura, F Camara, Pogba (Conde 85), Issiaga Sylla, O Balde (Mara 67), Soumah (Sankhon 67), Landel, A D Camara, Kamano (Alhassane Keita 85), Alkhaly Bangoura.

Mar 28 - Borg El Arab
Egypt 3 (Kahraba 49, El Shaikh 56, Elneny 63)
Togo 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000
Egypt: Ekramy - Elmohamady, Samir (Tarek 72), Hegazy, Hafez (Abdel-Shafy 72), Morsy (Hamed 78), Elneny, Jakobsen (El Shaikh 46), Sobhi, Warda (M Fathy 58), Kahraba (Gamal 64).

Mar 28 - Tallinn
Estonia 3 (Luts 1, Vassiljev 81, Zenjov 84)
Croatia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 4,987. **Ref:** Clattenburg (Eng)
Estonia: Aksalu (Meerits 46) - Teniste (Mool 86), Baranov, Klavan, Kallaste, Artjom Dmitrijev (Antonov 86), Mets, Kait, Toomet (Vassiljev 76), Luts, Henri Anier (Zenjov 70).
Croatia: L Kalinic - Leskovic, Mitrovic, Vida (Jedvaj 84), Bradaric (Badelj 58), Rog (Pivaric 58), Kovacic, Pjaca (Coric 66), Perisic, Kramaric, Cop.

Mar 28 - Paris
France 0
Spain 2 (Silva pen 68, Deulofeu 77)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 79,021. **Ref:** Zwayer (Ger)
France: Lloris - Jallet, Koscielny, Umtiti, Kurzawa, Tolisso (Lemar 80), Kante, Rabiot (Bakayoko 46), Griezmann, Mbappe (Giroud 65), Gameiro (Dembele 80).
Spain: De Gea - Carvajal, Pique, Sergio Ramos, Jordi Alba (Nacho 86), Koke (Ander Herrera 74), Busquets, Iniesta (Thiago 52), Pedro (Deulofeu 67), Morata (Iago Aspas 84), Isco (Silva 53).

Mar 28 - Tbilisi
Georgia 5 (Ananidze pen 18, 77, Kvilitaia 33, 68, Arabidze 90)
Latvia 0
HT: 2-0. **Ref:** Baliyan (Arm)
Georgia: Makaridze - Lobzhanidze, Kashia, Khocholava, Navalovski (Tabidze 78), Kvekveskiri, Ananidze (Kazaishvili 83), Gvilia (Kiteishvili 36), Jigauri (Arabidze 63), Kvilitaia (Kacharava 78), Dvalishvili (Kobakhidze 63).
Latvia: Vanins (Steinbors 46) - Maksimenko, Jagodinskis (Oss 46), Gorkss, Solovjovs, O Laizans (Lazdins 81), J Ikaunieks, Kluskins (Lukjanovs 65), A Visnakovs (Rakels 46), D Ikaunieks, Karlsons (Sabala 46).

Mar 28 - Linden
Guyana 0
Martinique 0

Mar 28 - Amsterdam
Holland 1 (Romagnoli og 10)
Italy 2 (Eder 11, Bonucci 32)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 46,228. **Ref:** Eriksson (Swe)
Holland: Zoet - Tete, Martins Indi, Hoedt, Blind (Viergever 83), Wijnaldum (Toornstra 77), Klaassen (Sneijder 83), Strootman (Vilhena 46), Lens, Depay, Promes (Berghuis 89).
Italy: Donnarumma - Rugani, Bonucci, Romagnoli, Zappacosta (Spinazzola 62), De Rossi (Gagliardini 37), Parolo, Darmian (D'Ambrosio 89), Verratti (Verdi 90), Eder (Petagna 69), Immobile (Belotti 53).

Mar 28 - Hesperange
Luxembourg 0
Cape Verde Islands 2 (Gege 8, Julio Tavares 23)
HT: 0-2
Luxembourg: Schon - Jans, C Martins (Hall 72), Malget, Carlson (Mahmutovic 30), Mutsch, Gerson (Deville 68), Philipps (Da Mota 46), Bohnert (Rodrigues 30), Turpel (Bensi 46), Joachim.
Cape Verde Islands: Vozinha - Tiago Almeida, Gege (Sergio Semedo 64), Fernando Varela, Babanco, Nuno Rocha (Helder Tavares 54), Carlos Ponck, Marco Soares (Carlitos 89), Garry Rodrigues (Kuca 79), Ze Luis (Jovane Cabral 85), Julio Tavares (Jamiro Monteiro 64).

Mar 28 - Skopje
Macedonia 3 (Spirovski 40, Pandev 61, 69)
Belarus 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,500. **Ref:** Radovanovic (Mne)
Macedonia: Dimitrievski - Ristevski, Mojsov, Shikov, Alioski (Churlinov 83), Trajkovski (Trickovski 56), Pandev (Trajchevski 73), Ristovski, Stjepanovikj (B Ibraimi 82), Spirovski (Toshevski 78), Nestorovski (Ejupi 79).
Belarus: Gutor - Dragun, Polyakov, Politsevich (Skavysh 46), Savitski (Gordeichuk 58), Stasevich, Kendysh (Bressan 71), Kislyak (Rios 75), Sivakov (Martynovich 84), Rodionov (Signevich 59), Volodko.

Mar 28 - Marrakech
Morocco 1 (Younes og 14)
Tunisia 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Sy (Sen)
Morocco: Bounou - Dirar, El Yamiq, Saiss, Nahiri, Carcela (Hafidi 26), Amrabat, Boussoufa, En-Nesyri (Azaro 60), Fajr, Bouhaddouz (Boutaib 90+1).
Tunisia: Ben Mustapha - Mbarki, Haddadi, Bronn, S Ben Youssef, Azouni, Ben Amor, Sliti (Khenissi 80), Lahmar (Akaichi 60), Laribi (F Ben Youssef 60), Younes (Mhirsi 60).

Mar 28 - Beira
Mozambique 1 (Dayo 90+1)
Lesotho 0
HT: 0-0

Mar 28 - Funchal
Portugal 2 (Cristiano Ronaldo 18, Granqvist og 34)
Sweden 3 (Claesson 57, 76, Joao Cancelo og 90+3)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 10,415. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)
Portugal: Marafona - Joao Cancelo, Bruno Alves, Luis Neto, Eliseu (Nelson Semedo 46), Danilo Pereira (William Carvalho 46), Renato Sanches, Joao Moutinho (Pizzi 46), Gelson Martins (Andre Gomes 79), Cristiano Ronaldo (Quaresma 59), Bernardo Silva (Eder 46).
Sweden: Johnsson - Krafth (Lustig 70), Granqvist (P Jansson 46), Helander (Hiljemark 89), Hult, Claesson, J Johansson, Sebastian Larsson, Sam Larsson (Durmaz 67), Nyman (Berg 87), Kiese Thelin.

Mar 28 - Dublin
Republic of Ireland 0
Iceland 1 (Magnusson 21)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 37,241. **Ref:** Kehlet (Den)
Republic of Ireland: Westwood - Christie, Egan (Boyle 62), Pearce, Brady, McGeady (O'Dowda 72), Hendrick (Gleeson 62), Hourihane (O'Kane 62), Hayes (Horgan 62), McClean (Long 72), K Doyle.
Iceland: O Kristinsson - B Saevarsson (V Jonsson 84), Ingason, R Sigurdsson (Eyjolfsson 53), A Sigurdarson (E Omarsson 64), J Bodvarsson, O Skulason (Smarason 78), A Gunnarsson, Magnusson, R Gislason (A Skulason 88), K Finnbogason (Karlsson 71).

Mar 28 - Sochi
Russia 3 (Vasin 3, Miranchuk 74, Bukharov 90+2)
Belgium 3 (Mirallas pen 17, Benteke 42, 45)
HT: 1-3. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)
Russia: Akinfeev - Vasin, Kudryashov, Neustadter, Samedov, Erokhin (Glushakov 76), Zobnin, Dzagoev (Ozdoev 17; Miranchuk 72), D Kombarov, Kanunnikov (Bukharov 46), Poloz (Golovin 62).
Belgium: Mignolet - Alderweireld, Vermaelen (Boyata 90), Vertonghen, Foket, Tielemans (Witsel 66), Dembele (T Hazard 85), Chadli (Carrasco 77), Nainggolan, Benteke (R Lukaku 77), Mirallas (Mertens 66).

Mar 28 - East London
South Africa 0
Angola 0
Att: 11,700. **Ref:** Bondo (Bot)
South Africa: Keet - Thopola (Mphahlele 46), Mathoho, Coetzee, Langerman, Jali, Mabunda, Mahlambi (T Zwane 46), Manyama (Serero 46), Singh (Dolly 46), Tau (Erasmus 74).
Angola: Neblu - Lunguinha, Nary, Bastos, Natael, Manguxi, Dudu (Paty 77), Herenilson, Nandinho, Yano (Va 65), Ary Papel (Edy Afonso 54).

Mar 28 - Dar es Salaam
Tanzania 2 (Msuva 22, Yusuf 79)
Burundi 1 (Mavugo 54)
HT: 1-0

Club football

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 16)

1st legs

Feb14
Benfica (Por) 1 (Mitroglou 48)
Borussia Dortmund (Ger) 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 55,124. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)

Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) 4 (Di Maria 18, 55, Draxler 40, Cavani 72)
Barcelona (Spa) 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 46,484. **Ref:** Marciniak (Pol)

Feb15
Bayern Munich (Ger) 5 (Robben 11, Lewandowski 53, Thiago 56, 63, Muller 88)
Arsenal (Eng) 1 (Sanchez 30)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)

Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Benzema 18, Kroos 49, Casemiro 54)
Napoli (Ita) 1 (Insigne 8)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 78,000. **Ref:** Skomina (Sln)

Feb 21
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger) 2 (Bellarabi 48, Savic og 68)
Atletico Madrid (Spa) 4 (Saul 17, Griezmann 25, Gameiro pen 59, Fernando Torres 86)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 29,300. **Ref:** Collum (Sco)

Manchester City (Eng) 5 (Sterling 26, Aguero 58, 71, Stones 77, Sane 82)
Monaco (Fra) 3 (Falcao 32, 61, Mbappe 40)
HT: 1-2. **Att:** 53,351. **Ref:** Mateu Lahoz (Spa)

Feb 22
Porto (Por) 0
Juventus (Ita) 2 (Pjaca 72, Daniel Alves 74)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 49,229. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Sent off: Alex Telles (Porto) 27

Sevilla (Spa) 2 (Sarabia 25, Correa 62)
Leicester City (Eng) 1 (Vardy 73)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 38,834. **Ref:** Turpin (Fra)

2nd legs

Mar 7
Arsenal 1 (Walcott 20)
Bayern Munich 5 (Lewandowski pen 55, Robben 68, Douglas Costa 78, Vidal 80, 85)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 59,911. **Ref:** Sidiropoulos (Gre)
Sent off: Koscielny (Arsenal) 53
Bayern Munich10-2 on agg

Napoli 1 (Mertens 24)
Real Madrid 3 (Sergio Ramos 52, Mertens og 57, Morata 90+1)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 56,695. **Ref:** Cakir (Tur)
Real Madrid 6-2 on agg

Mar 8
Barcelona 6 (Suarez 3, Kurzawa og 40, Messi pen 50, Neymar 88, pen 90+1, Sergi Roberto 90+5)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Cavani 62)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 96,290. **Ref:** Aytekin (Ger)
Barcelona 6-5 on agg

Borussia Dortmund 4 (Aubameyang 4, 61, 85, Pulisic 59)
Benfica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 65,849. **Ref:** Atkinson (Eng)
Borussia Dortmund 4-1 on agg

Mar14
Juventus 1 (Dybala pen 42)
Porto 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 41,161. **Ref:** Hategan (Rom)
Sent off: M Pereira (Porto) 40
Juventus 3-0 on agg

Leicester City 2 (Morgan 27, Albrighton 54)
Sevilla 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 31,520. **Ref:** Orsato (Ita)
Sent off: Nasri (Sevilla) 74
Leicester City 3-2 on agg

Mar15
Atletico Madrid 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0
Att: 49,133. **Ref:** Karasev (Rus)
Atletico Madrid 4-2 on agg

Monaco 3 (Mbappe 8, Fabinho 29, Bakayoko 77)
Manchester City 1 (Sane 71)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 15,700. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Agg 6-6; Monaco on away goals

EUROPA LEAGUE

2nd knockout round (last 16)

1st legs - Mar 9; 2nd legs - Mar16
APOEL (Cyp) v Anderlecht (Blg) 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2); Celta Vigo (Spa) v Krasnodar (Rus) 2-1, 2-0 (agg 4-1); Copenhagen (Den) v Ajax (Hol) 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3); Gent (Blg) v Genk (Blg) 2-5, 1-1 (agg 3-6); Lyon (Fra) v Roma (Ita) 4-2, 1-2 (agg 5-4); Olympiakos (Gre) v Besiktas (Tur) 1-1, 1-4 (agg 2-5); Rostov (Rus) v Manchester United (Eng) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Schalke (Ger) v Monchengladbach (Ger) 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3, Schalke on away goals)

GEORGIA

2016 Championship Final

1st leg - Dec 3; 2nd leg - Dec11
Samtredia v Chikhura 2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2)

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round

1st legs - Mar10-12; 2nd legs - Mar18/19
AC Leopards (Con) v Saint George (Eth) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Al Ahli Tripoli (Lby) v FUS Rabat (Mor) 2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Al Ahli Tripoli on away goals); Al Ahly (Egy) v Bidvest Wits (SAf) 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0); Al Hilal Omdurman (Sud) v AS Port-Louis 2000 (Mts) 3-0, 2-2 (agg 5-2); Coton Sport (Cam) v CNaPS (Mad) 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1); Esperance Tunis (Tun) v Horoya (Gui) 3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3); Etoile Sahel (Tun) v Tanda (IvC) 3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1); Ferroviario Beira (Moz) v Barrack Young Controllers (Lbr) 2-0, 0-2 (agg 2-2, Ferroviario Beira 4-1 on pens); Gambia Ports Authority (Gam) v AS Vita (DRC) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf) v KCCA (Uga) 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2); Rivers United (Nga) v Al Merreikh (Sud) 3-0, 0-4 (agg 3-4); TP Mazembe (DRC) v CAPS United (Zim) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, CAPS United on away goals); USM Alger (Alg) v Rail Club du Kadiogo (BuF) 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1); Wydad Casablanca (Mor) v Mounana (Gab) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Wydad Casablanca 5-4 on pens); Young Africans (Tan) v Zanaco (Zam) 1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, Zanaco on away goals); Zamalek (Egy) v Enugu Rangers (Nga) 4-1, 1-2 (agg 5-3)

● *The winners have qualified for the group stage; the losers enter the Confederation Cup at the play-off round stage*

CONFEDERATION CUP

1st round

1st legs - Mar10-12; 2nd legs - Mar17-19
Al Ahli Shendi (Sud) v SuperSport United (SAf) 3-2, 0-4 (agg 3-6); AS Kaloum (Gui) v Ittihad Tanger (Mor) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); ASEC Abidjan (IvC) v APEJES Academy (Cam) 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1); Azam (Tan) v Mbabane Swallows (Swa) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); CS Sfaxien (Tun) v YOSA (Cam) 5-0, 1-1 (agg 6-1); Etoile du Congo (Con) v JS Kabylie (Alg) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Maghreb Fes (Mor) v SC Gagnoa (IvC) 3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2); MC Alger (Alg) v Renaissance du Congo (DRC) 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2); Recreativo Libolo (Ang) v Ngezi Platinum (Zim) 2-1, 0-0 (agg 2-1); Sanga Balende (DRC) v Al Hilal Obayed (Sud) 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Al Hilal Obayed 5-3 on pens); Smouha (Egy) v Ulinzi Stars (Ken) 4-0, 0-3 (agg 4-3); Vipers (Uga) v Platinum Stars (SAf) 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3); Zesco United (Zam) v Le Messager Ngozi (Bdi) 2-0, 2-2 (agg 4-2)

Club Africain (Tun) v RSLAF (SLe) - Club Africain walkover, RSLAF withdrew after1st leg (which Club Africain won 9-1); Djoliba (Mli) v Al Masry (Egy) - Al Masry walkover, Djoliba disqualified after1st leg (which they'd won 2-0) following the Mali federation's suspension; Onze Createurs (Mli) v Rayon Sports (Rwa) - Rayon Sports walkover, Onze Createurs disqualified after the 1st leg (which they'd won1-0) following the Mali federation's suspension

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals

1st legs - Mar14/15; 2nd legs - Apr 4/5
Dallas (USA) v Pachuca (Mex) 2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)
Tigres UANL (Mex) v Vancouver Whitecaps (Can) 2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1)

BERMUDA

2016-17 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Robin Hood (C)	18	13	2	3	40	9	41
PHC Zebras	18	12	5	1	40	16	41
North Village	18	12	3	3	32	20	39
Dev Cougars	18	7	6	5	22	21	27
Somerset T	18	6	7	5	25	25	25
Boulevard	18	6	5	7	28	32	23
Dandy Town	18	6	3	9	36	35	21
Flanagan's O	18	4	4	10	21	34	16
Som Eagles (R)	18	2	6	10	20	37	12
Dev Colts (R)	18	1	1	16	19	54	4

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

Feb 25: Madang (PNG) 3 Central Sport (Tah) 7; Lupe Ole Soaga (Sam) 1 Magenta (NwC) 2.
Feb 28: Lupe Ole Soaga 3 Madang 4; Magenta 4 Central Sport 2.
Mar 3: Central Sport 3 Lupe Ole Soaga 0; Magenta 5 Madang 0.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Magenta (Q)	3	3	0	0	11	3	9
Central Sport	3	2	0	1	12	7	6
Madang	3	1	0	2	7	15	3
Lupe Ole S	3	0	0	3	4	9	0

Group B

Feb 26: Puaikura (Coo) 1 Team Wellington (NZ) 4; Ba (Fij) 1 Hienghene Sport (NwC) 1.
Mar 1: Puaikura 0 Ba 1; Team Wellington 3 Hienghene Sport 1.
Mar 4: Team Wellington 8 Ba 0; Hienghene Sport 3 Puaikura 1.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
T Well'ton (Q)	3	3	0	0	15	2	9
Hienghene	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Ba	3	1	1	1	2	9	4
Puaikura	3	0	0	3	2	8	0

Group C

Mar 11: Malampa Revivors (Van) 2 Lae City Dwellers (PNG) 5; Western United (Sol) 1 Auckland City (NZ) 2.
Mar 15: Western United 2 Malampa Revivors 1; Auckland City 2 Lae City Dwellers 0.
Mar 18: Lae City Dwellers 3 Western United 5; Auckland City 11 Malampa Revivors 0.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GP C – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Auckland C (Q)	3	3	0	0	15	1	9
Western Utd	3	2	0	1	8	6	6
Lae City D	3	1	0	2	8	9	3
Malampa Rev	3	0	0	3	3	18	0

Group D

Mar 11: Marist (Sol) 4 Rewa (Fij) 2; Erakor Golden Star (Van) 2 Tefana (Tah) 4.
Mar 14: Erakor GS 2 Marist 1; Tefana 2 Rewa 0.
Mar 17: Rewa 2 Erakor GS 1; Tefana 2 Marist 2.

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GP D – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tefana (Q)	3	2	1	0	8	4	7
Marist	3	1	1	1	7	6	4
Erakor GS	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Rewa	3	1	0	2	4	7	3

● *Group winners have qualified for semi-finals*

NEW ZEALAND

2016-17 Championship Final

Apr 2: Auckland City 1 Team Wellington 2.

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage
(QF) = qualified for World Cup finals

May 2017 Vol 57 No 9

EDITOR Gavin Hamilton
ASSISTANT EDITOR Nich Hills
DESIGN DIRECTOR Kevin Eason
DESIGN EDITOR Jamie Latchford
DEPUTY DESIGN EDITOR Daniel Franklin
PICTURE EDITOR Duncan Bond
EDITORIAL SECRETARY Leeanne Wright

PICTURES
Pictures copyright: Press Association Images, Getty Images

Thanks this issue to
Dean Chillmaid, Peter Neish

EDITORIAL
Pinehurst 2, Pinehurst Road, Farnborough Business Park, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7BF
Email: world_soccer@timeinc.com
General enquries: +44 (0) 1252 555213

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Matthew Johnston
Tel: +44 (0) 1252 555367
Email: matthew.johnston@timeinc.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Becky Singleton
MANAGING DIRECTOR Simon Owen
GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR Oswin Grady

International licensing enquiries
+44 (0) 20 314 85490
Email: bianca.hamilton-foster@timeinc.com

Time Inc.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ORDER HOTLINE
+44 (0)333 333 1113
or visit www.magazinesdirect.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES
Annual sub is for 12 months (13 issues, prices include postage) UK: £66.79 Europe/Eire (inc. VAT): 98.85 euros (airmail) USA: $144.48 (airmail) Rest of world: £99.25 (airmail)

Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPARTMENT
WORLD SOCCER SUBSCRIPTIONS
PO Box 20501
1001 NM Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: +44 (0) 330 333 4333

WorldSoccer is a member of
ESM EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

● A Bola (Portugal) ● De Telegraaf (Holland)
● ElfVoetbal (Holland) ● Fanatik (Turkey)
● Frankfurter Allgemeine (Germany)
● Goal News (Greece) ● Kicker (Germany)
● Marca (Spain) ● Nemzeti Sport (Hungary)
● So Foot (France) ● Sport-Express (Russia)
● Sport/Foot (Belgium) ● TIPS Bladet (Denmark)
● World Soccer (UK)

World Soccer's GREAT MATCHES

JUNE 7, 1970, MEXICO: WORLD CUP

Brazil 1 England 0

England go close against a team that will come to be regarded as one of the greatest of all time

Stopped...Brazil keeper Felix denies England

In the heat and humidity of Guadalajara, the World Cup holders from 1966 came face to face with Brazil, the winners in 1958 and 1962, in a fascinating group game. And although the climate meant proceedings would start slowly, the quality of the football on show was remarkable.

Missing the injured Gerson, Brazil moved Rivelino into a more central midfield role and brought in 20-year-old Paulo Cesar on the left wing. With Jairzinho operating on the opposite flank, the two wide men gave England's full-backs, Tommy Wright and Terry Cooper, a torrid time throughout.

However, with midfielder Alan Mullery helping out Brian Labone and the outstanding Bobby Moore, England were able to contain the Brazilian front pair of Tostao and Pele for the most part.

It was Pele who had the first clear-cut chance, leaping above Mullery to head goalwards, only for Gordon Banks to palm the ball over the bar in what is considered by many to be the greatest save of all time.

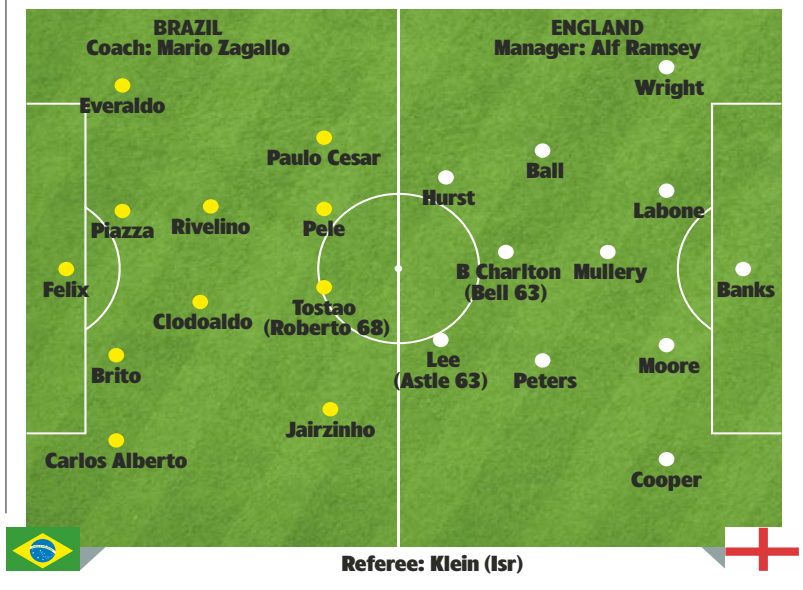
At the other end, Bobby Charlton never stopped running, while Francis Lee was a constant threat.

But it was Brazil who eventually broke the deadlock, as Tostao for once got the better of Moore and Pele showed his genius with two simple touches to set up Jairzinho, who shot beyond Banks.

Iconic...Bobby Moore (left) and Pele

Six minutes later, Jairzinho broke free at pace but Moore waited patiently before stealing the ball and releasing Cooper, whose cross found an unmarked Jeff Astle. But from just 12 yards out, and with keeper Felix stationary, England's sub could only skew his shot wide of the post.

At the final whistle, Moore and Pele embraced. Both sides would qualify for the knockout stage with Brazil going on to lift the trophy two weeks later with a 4-1 victory over Italy in the Final. WS



Referee: Klein (Isr)

KEY MOMENTS

Stunning...Gordon Banks saves from Pele

6min A dangerous cross from the right by Alan Ball outfoxes Brazil goalkeeper Felix but misses the far post by inches.

10min Jairzinho beats England left-back Terry Cooper and crosses to the far post, where Pele outjumps Alan Mullery and heads downwards, only for Gordon Banks to produce a stunning save and palm the ball over the bar.

31min Mullery plays the ball out to Tommy Wright who crosses to Francis Lee, but his header is saved.

59min Tostao nutmegs England skipper Bobby Moore and crosses from the left of the penalty area to Pele, who rolls the ball into the path of Jairzinho who beats Banks. **1-0**

65min Jairzinho breaks at pace, but is tackled by Moore in the penalty area.

Winner...Jairzinho scores

66min Following that tackle, Moore passes to Cooper, whose cross falls to Jeff Astle, but he rolls his shot wide of a post.

75min Moore's pass finds Ball, whose shot clips the crossbar.

Chance...Jeff Astle puts his shot wide

NEXT MONTH JUNE ISSUE ON SALE MAY 19

wyscout

Soccer Analytics Course

DREAMING of a CAREER in SOCCER?

Tommy Smyth
ESPN Soccer Analyst

Matt Martin
MLS Timbers
Scouting Director

Lee Fraser
Newcastle United
Technical Scout

John Print
FIFA Agent

Sky Andrews
FIFA Agent

Lynn Lashbrook
SMWW President

Start or Advance Your Career in:

- Scouting
- Sports Agent
- Broadcasting
- Game Operations
- Head Coach
- Soccer Analytics
- Player Personnel
- Marketing & PR
- Management
- Front Office

8-week online interactive training courses led by experts in the English Premier League, Football League and MLS includes:

- **Tommy Smyth** – ESPN Soccer Analyst
- **Matt Martin** – MLS Portland Timbers Scouting Director
- **Lee Fraser** – Newcastle United FC Technical Scout
- **John Print** – FIFA Agent
- **Sky Andrews** – FIFA Agent
- **Dr. Lynn Lashbrook** – SMWW President

JOIN US
London Football Career Conference
30 Sept. - 1 Oct. 2017

Learn the skills, strategies and techniques to advance to the front of the hiring line in soccer scouting, talent ID, soccer agency, sports marketing and pro soccer leagues including: EPL, La Liga, Serie A, Ligue 1, Bundesliga, A-League and MLS.

SMWW SPORTSMANAGEMENTWORLDWIDE
The Global Leader in Sports Education | SMWW.com
USA & Canada 503-445-7105 | UK +44 (0)20 8767 0067

SW_4_17

PRO:DIRECT

SOCCER

PUMA SUPER ATOM

LIMITED EDITION - 100 PAIRS WORLDWIDE

QR: 141654

www.prodirectsoccer.com